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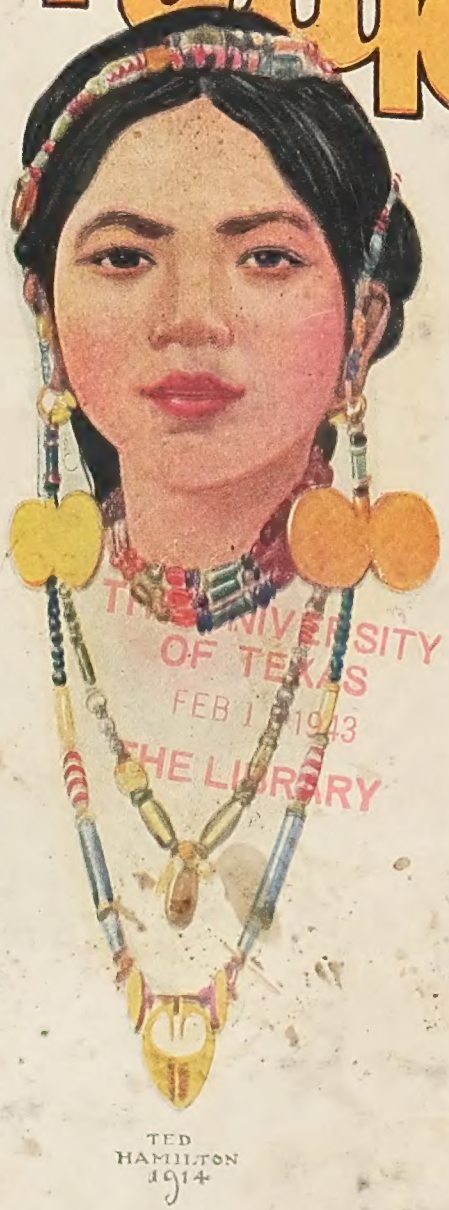

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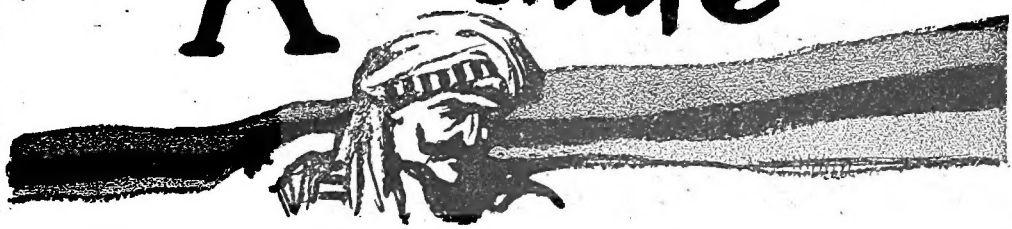
Vol. 8 **Adventure** No. 3



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Come-On Charley

The only announcement this needs is the first *Come-On Charley* story in this number in your hands.

The Ultimate Inheritors

A complete novelette of the West that will never let your eye leave the page till the end.

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JULY 1914 VOL. 8 NO. 3

PROLOGUE

"I'll be a tiger," the jackal whined,
Spreading himself in the sun to grow;
But he ate when the tiger had killed and dined,
And he did not boast to the tiger so.
"Honest ambition is bound to win;
I'll be an eagle," the blue crow cried;
But did he worry the eagle thin?
Was it of fear that the eagle died?

T. M.

"THAT will do," said Ebbert, the Commissioner, and a subordinate removed himself, looking sidewise as he left the room at a rather portly, very grizzled, wrinkled Hindu who squatted inconspicuously in a corner; he noticed that for a stout man he was even singularly inconspicuous.

"Will you shut the door, please?"

The subordinate turned back and shut it, but not without letting his eyebrows show surprise. Sometimes there is no doubt at all why almost brilliant men remain subordinate.

"And now, Gulbaz, I want you to please listen," said the Commissioner. "We have very little time, and the matter is important."

"I am all ears, sahib," answered Gulbaz, seeming mostly shoulders as he rose and took up a subjective attitude by Ebbert's desk. His eyes were rather like a lizard's—bright and keen, but shaded by the sleepiest of lids.

Ebbert did not trouble to look hard at him, as he would have done if ordering a man whom he merely believed in. He knew Gulbaz, which was different.

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"The reports are all in, including yours. I have studied them, and they have been studied higher up. They tally. The evidence fits piece by piece, and—er—*he* is on the way. Of course, you'll readily understand without my elaborating it that this is one of those occasions on which more than ever we must draw a hard-and-fast line between your Service and the police."

Gulbaz allowed himself to smile.

"I mean, the police will expect to protect his Highness, and will have to be allowed to do so. You will have to manage as usual, more or less in spite of the police."

"Sahib, I have spent three and thirty years serving the Government in spite of the police."

Now Ebbert smiled. He knew better than most men that a policeman and a Secret Servant are in all essentials as the very poles apart.

"Have you decided where to spread your net?"

"At Yasmini's, sahib."

"Are you positive that the police are not too well acquainted with her? Might they not blunder in and spoil things?"

"Not with your Honor's hand on the reins," said Gulbaz.

"Doesn't Martineau see a good deal of her?"

"Yes, sahib; and of me as well."

"Might he not be in the way?"

Gulbaz smiled again.

"Sahib, he is a policeman! Many a bird has eaten grain in the shadow of a constabeel."

"Very well, Gulbaz, as long as you're on your guard."

"And this Nawazish Ali, sahib?"

"Is due for the rope as soon as we can lay our fingers on him. First, though, let him lead the rest into the trap."

"Certainly, sahib. He would stand no chance of a reprieve?"

"None whatever. How could he?"

Gulbaz blinked, but gave no other sign that the fate of this Nawazish Ali interested him.

"Then I have your leave to go, sahib?"

"Yes. Keep in touch with me, move by move, and look out for young Martineau. That young man's ambitious."

"Sahib, a policeman who is ambitious—a frog who would be a buffalo—a sparrow who would try to be a hawk—are one! We of the Secret Service are not afraid of the police!" said Gulbaz, bowing himself out and waddling, as elderly fat men walk, to where his sandals waited on the lower step outside. There he under-feed the *chuprassy* who stood guard over them, and departed in a hurricane of low-pitched but searching abuse, of which he had by far the better.

Not far from the office he met Martineau of the police, riding a cheap native-bred, and Martineau drew rein.

"Where are you bound for, Gulbaz?"

"Sahib, I know no more than you."

"But I do know where I'm going to."

"It is good, then, to be a policeman, sahib," answered Gulbaz. And he went on with a very deep salaam.

CHAPTER I

Brother mine, the fire is bright—
  See, the light-ring glimmer
Outward—outward to the night—
  Dimmer, growing dimmer!
Speed! The fire dies with the day!
Dawn is cheerless, dawn is gray!
Wing! While eyes and wings and way
  Shimmer—shimmer—shimmer!

—*Yasmini's Moth Song*

NOT even the whole of India's surface is explored as yet, and perhaps that is the hundred-thousandth part of all that is explorable—or will be, when the gods permit. And the gods of India are many; their permission—seriatim, piecemeal, or in bulk—would be expensive.

For instance: there is Yasmini, and her abode, and what she did, and how she lives, and why—particularly why. The Government of India would refuse to answer questions about any of these things, and what that Government will not discuss is not within the reach of you or me.

It is better to leave some of it guessed at, and for the rest to take as true the talk of the bazaars—the hints that Gulbaz dropped occasionally (though beware of Gulbaz!)—and even, with certain reservations, Yasmini's own account.

For if Yasmini be admitted to have ladled out the truth in driblets at a time, and much diffused, at least she knew it. Bazaar talk has it that Yasmini forgets nothing. And those strange songs of hers, quick-springing out of conversation and gem-set in laughter, are not so pointless as they sometimes seem; each has its key, and each one frames a riddle.

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Listen, then. Piece song to song, and hint to hint. Remember. And be still.

SHE came to Delhi, by no means for the first time, still a-laugh from an adventure with a Bengal regiment of horse. She had done nothing particularly legal in Bengal, although she fell foul of no Government, and was forced to render no account to any one of what she did; and though for all anybody knew, her business now in Delhi might concern the universe at large, the nature of it was as inconspicuous as—say—the source of the Afridi-Pathan gun supply.

So far as the universe at large could tell, or such small part of it as came within her sphere, her present business was amusement, if that be business; she sang songs, and danced divinely, while people who were favored watched and listened.

Gulbaz was favored, and so was Martineau. But it would not do to seek Martineau's explanation, for he was a policeman; and white policemen—particularly officers—vary little in certain respects the wide world over. He would merely be polite, and finish up by making you imagine him a fool; and that, in addition to discourtesy, would be causing you to err. Yasmini handled him with a gloved hand always; and like many others of her hints, that too was worth the studying.

Gulbaz seldom spoke of Yasmini, and never directly, however often he might pay her visits. Gulbaz liked hints, and hidden metaphors, and references to "a woman whom I know," or to "her," or to "a certain one." He never ate at Yasmini's—and that is important. But he would be very pleased to talk about her garden; and from his account of it it must have been a wonder of a place.

He said it could be seen (and Martineau confirmed him) from the upper window where she sometimes sat and sang. But only her most intimate acquaintances were ever asked to share the window seat; and even the upper window, to the rear, was hidden from the world that bows the knee and barters by a wall or two that monkeys could not scale.

You can't tell whose walls they are in India, unless you start out with your survey instruments, and know enough to find your way alive with them through alleys that seem to defy the compass. Men said those walls were Yasmini's, but men say anything in India, and they may not have been. The lowest, at the southern end, was forty or more feet high—straight up, without a crack or cranny; and without a gate.

The trees on the other side of it (so Gulbaz said) were of a hundred sorts and shapes and heights and fragrances. Sometimes, when the warm wind came eddy-wise, jumping the wall and scooting down the alleys, one could scent delectable aromas that conceivably were picked up in her garden, and that made men think—then—that Gulbaz did not lie.

He said (and he should have known) that there were birds amid the trees, and bees to hum amid the flowers, and a fountain where the birds might bathe and trill their thanks.

He said that Yasmini loved birds and bees—although he had, too, a parable he loved to air about a bee who gathered honey and a bird who ate the bee. Perhaps he picked it up from Yasmini, for more than one of her songs played with that idea.

The entrance to her house was plain enough, and near enough to a wide street, that led into a street that led into the Chandni Chowk. One could have found it, provided he had some idea of Indian streets, almost without directions; and directions, and an introduction both, could have been had from Martineau. There was no aloofness about Yasmini, to first appearance, that was more than the ordinary wisdom of an ordinary woman might dictate.

It was when one had gained entrance by the twisty, deep-carved wooden stairs, up past the blue and red and green glass lights, and through the heavy crimson curtains that tinkled as one passed—up from the stink of India into India delectable and passionate and dim—that one would be confronted with a barrier.

A maid would meet the visitor—a little snuff-brown maid, who purred, and laughed with egg-shell teeth, and led one to a comfortable divan by a window; but, beyond a curtained alcove, that window gave on to the street. It was only through another curtained door that one obtained the half-suggested scent of green things growing—a dim hint of the chattering of birds and the plash of water, and (this much quite clearly) Yasmini's laughter through the underhum of music, or her sweet voice raised in song.

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She would come out presently—if one who moved as she did could be rightly said to come. She would appear. One would look, and she was there; for when she moved she made no sound at all unless a bangle tinkled and made music to her step.

It was just as when she danced—her movements were nearly too quick to follow and too silent to believe; she would become a series of glorious blue-lit curves amid the sandal-smoke, and then be still.

She had moved. She had danced. But no living being could recall the steps she took; they were too much like the movements in a dream.

Sometimes Martineau would pass into the inner room, and sometimes he would lounge amid the yard-deep cushions of the outer hall, surrounded at a more or less respectful distance by lesser fry, who did not necessarily like police officers but who did not care to suggest their dislike. Being no part of the Covenanted Service, but a mere policeman, Martineau was not considered "much of a man" in clubdom; but he was welcome where certain subcommissioners would not have been allowed, and the life had its compensations.

Gulbaz sat only in the inner room; he objected to the outer hall publicity. But that made no difference to Yasmini; her songs would bubble up out of their mother-mirth as if only her maidens and the birds were listening, and Gulbaz might blink and nod, blink and nod, blink and nod until the stars came out; she seemed to take very little notice of him. Generally he would stay on after Martineau had gone.

MARTINEAU sent him away early, though, on the afternoon of the day that brought the Grand Duke Peter and his following of lesser lights and darknesses to Delhi. He whispered to him for a while; then, as if any excuse would do, he pointed to a tear in Gulbaz' sleeve and made a joke about it, telling him to go and clothe his nakedness.

The old man wriggled to his feet, nodded his adieux, and went, parting the curtains at the stair head and negotiating the twisty stairs short-sightedly. Martineau sank back with a sigh of comfort amid the blue-and-old-gold cushions, breathing intoxicating scents and dreaming to the music.

Then (she seemed for this occasion to have been dancing just for Gulbaz) the movement and the rhythm left Yasmini, and she came and sat by Martineau, although not near enough to give him fair excuse for pride.

"Why am I honored?" she asked him, folding both hands on one knee, and looking more bewitching than is good for ordinary men. Martineau was not an ordinary man, but he caught himself being sorry that he was not. (He checked the thought instantly, as not being appropriate to the Game he wished to play. The Game, as will be seen, is all-demanding.)

"I came this time to speak to Gulbaz," he answered her, in that voice that young men think will pacify a woman.

"Not to speak to me?"

Her eyes were laughing at him—eyes that would have roused the jealous anger of a woman of the West; they were watching each least movement of his own, and he felt that the back of his head was naked.

"What is there to say to Yasmini except——"

"That I am beautiful, and that my eyes shine, and that I dance more beautifully than a spirit of the woods! I have heard all that a thousand times, and then a thousand. It is true; and the truth is tiresome, too oft repeated. Yes, what else? And——"

She spoke to him in Hindustani, as she generally did when she felt impudent. It was one of her stock jokes to make pretense that he did not understand any of the rarer tongues. Most of her jokes were subtler.

"And——Oh, that the Grand Duke Peter will be here in Delhi."

"And——? What of it? I am to dance for him? He is to see what he will call a *nautch*, eh? Then, when he goes home he is to tell people that he saw—what?"

"The East in all its mystery!" Martineau laughed back at her. "He will tell them that he knows it all. His secretary will write about you in the book which the Duke intends to sign, with a photograph of you if he can persuade you to let him take it, and—er—to wear more clothes for the occasion. The Grand Duke only puts his name to highly moral books."

For once Yasmini was in the dark as to his meaning, for her morals were Eastern of the East, and she could not have understood the Grand Duke's (which were West-

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ern of the East) if she had tried for twenty years. Incidentally, she might not have gained much if she had been able to, although in his own land and to some extent throughout the rest of Europe the Duke was not without a certain reputation.

But she hated not to understand, and hated still more to admit that she did not; for East and West alike, that is the way of those who deal in mystery.

"I will not, this time!" she answered. "The lord sahib may seek other things to while away his time. There are other dancing-girls."

"I never called you dancing-girl."

"You? When you were a little *butcha*, so big, you would have known better! But he—he will. No. I will not!"

She motioned, and a maid began to strum on a stringed instrument. Then, as if to show Martineau how much would be denied to royalty, she began to dance to him, while he lay back and farther back amid the cushions, computing with those deep gray Western eyes of his how many thousands, in how many kinds of coin, this marvel of the East could earn in other lands.

Not that he supposed she needed money. Few princes, even in India where men think lavishly and wear their riches for the world to see, could have shown a richer nest, or one more splendidly adorned. His was the Western type of thought dammed up by Eastern circumstance, and flowing over at the line of least resistance (which is almost always commercial). Had she not stopped dancing he would have priced her jewels next—and would probably have guessed too short by thousands of rupees. Even her toes were jeweled.

But, as her custom was, she ceased when a new whim seized her, and seemed all at once to be a part of the divan again, her breath coming evenly through smiling lips as if she had not moved at all.

"Sometimes I have been of use to you," suggested Martineau, who, like most policemen, could assess the value of the little privileges he was able to confer. "Do you remember——"

"I remember more than you will ever know, sahib!" She was looking impudent again, and speaking Hindustani. "Tell me what you said a while ago to Gulbaz, that I may remember that as well."

He laughed, and looked down at the buttons on his uniform. He usually wore his full dress when he called on Yasmini, partly out of compliment and partly to remind her who and what he was—mostly, perhaps, to remind himself, for Yasmini was Yasmini.

"Are we to drive a bargain?" he asked her, looking serious again. "Are you asking me to tell official secrets?"

"Yes! If I am to dance for the lord sahib, then yes! What did you say to Gulbaz? Then yes, I dance!"

"I asked Gulbaz whether you would dance. He answered, no. So I ordered him away that I might talk with you alone. That is the exact truth."

"I *said* that the truth is wearisome!" sighed Yasmini.

"Now, though, we have bargained, and you promised. So you will dance, and I can follow Gulbaz."

He arose to make his words good. A maid over by the big window made a sign to Yasmini—a little, scarcely noticeable sign in the affirmative—and she arose, too, smiling up at his six feet and arching all her suppleness into a yawn.

"Yes. Go away; you weary me. Policeman sahibs only tell uninteresting things; they have the minds of little children, and the manners of the jungle folk. Yes, I will dance for the lord sahib. It is only I who can fashion things of interest."

HE MISSED the insinuation in her last remark, though two of her maids heard it and suppressed a giggle. He heard her laugh, though, as he passed through the outer hall, and nodded to himself, realizing that the West, however wise and careful, can be little but amusing to the East.

He took the stairs with something less than usual conceit, for life was rather serious to him, and he did not care at all to be amusing, even to Yasmini; and he was in a brown study when he stumbled in the street near the entrance he had just left. He had to look twice before he realized that he had stumbled over something more than ordinary.

"Get up, Gulbaz!" he commanded. "What's the matter, man? Opium, I suppose," he added in an undertone. "I thought he seemed sleepy."

He repeated the command in Hindustani, but the man lay still, and Martineau stooped over him. He could see no sign of

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a wound. He shook him savagely, but got no answer; then turned him over and examined him more carefully.

"Gulbaz!" he muttered. "Sure enough, Gulbaz!"

Still he could find no knife wound and no bruise; but there seemed no heartbeat either. He examined the clothing, piece by piece—the black alpaca jacket, the Hindu loin cloth, the cotton stockings and elastic-sided boots, that constitute the Hindu compromise with Western habits. But for the small tear on the sleeve there was no outward sign of violence. Finally he stooped again, and sniffed the lips.

"Um-m-m! Vegetable poison of some sort!"

He glanced up and down the street and listened; but in front of Yasmini's the street bends almost sharply to either hand, and no man was in sight; so he blew his whistle. A constable came presently—at first in no apparent hurry; then, when he saw Martineau, at a swift double.

"Who is this man here?" demanded Martineau.

"Gulbaz," said the constable, stooping over him and lifting a stiffening eyelid with his thumb. Martineau seemed interested in the eyelid.

"I suppose you saw nothing?" This with more than a hint of sarcasm.

"Nay, I saw nothing, sahib."

"Heard nothing?"

"Nay, sahib, I heard nothing."

"Stay here. Don't move away or let anybody touch the body until I send some one to remove it. Understand?"

"I understand, sahib."

"Keep an eye on these half dozen houses here, and make a report afterward of who leaves any of them."

"Atcha, sahib."

The constable saluted, and Martineau walked away, again in a brown study.

"Now I wonder what the little game is?" he reflected. "Height—weight—clothing—everything the same, down to the tiniest detail. Torn sleeve, too! That was clever of Gulbaz, that was—a lesser rogue wouldn't have thought of it; and I dare bet the two tears tally to a thousandth of an inch!

"I'd give a month's pay at this minute to be on to Gulbaz' little game! Judging by his eyelid, that man has been dead at least two hours. It's stiff. I saw Gulbaz alive and well less than an hour ago. Clever! Clever! Dashed clever! Gad, I wish I could see through it!"

Some policemen would have raised a hue and cry at once. Others might even have gone to the length of searching Yasmini's, for there are idiots in every service, not excluding the police. But Martineau was not an idiot, and did not apply for any warrant.

He walked on—the only man, apparently, who cared to walk in the three-o'clock glare—past the Chandni Chowk to where his pony waited at a corner. (He never rode to Yasmini's.) And at the Chandni Chowk he paused a little while to look ahead of him. He laughed then, aloud, at the thought of finding Gulbaz, or any other man, amid the many-hued and many-tongued kaleidoscope that is the mart, and melting-pot in one, of Delhi and of India.

"I wonder—was that why she laughed?" he wondered. "Is she—is Yasmini in this? I'd give—I'd give the very deuce and all to know if Yasmini's in this!"

CHAPTER II

A tiger lay by a pool in wait—
His print was there, pressed hard and deep.
The chital called his grazing mate—
A wolf knew where they lay to sleep.
The *bandar* found a leaf-hid berth—
A python seized him on the tree,
Then trailed his mark along the earth.
'Tis only we are trackless—we!
—*Song of the Secret Service Men*

BY-HANDY to the River Jumna, cross-legged in a 'tween-roof aerie of a place, from whose unglazed, slit-like window could be seen the three domes of Jama Masjid (and almost nothing in between, so narrow was the opening between the masonry)—sweating a little in the heat, but seeming bland and happy as a temple idol—sat a Hindu, wrinkled, old, and grizzle-headed, blinking through silver-rimmed spectacles.

He did nothing except blink, like some tremendous toad, imprisoned by his own size within a rock hole. As a toad might, he seemed to have resigned himself to circumstances. He gave no extra blink and made no display of interest when, through the under-din of plying trades and noisy argument that arose like reinvented Babel from the floors below, there came the creak of some one heavy, coming closer, trusting his weight to the complaining stairs.

He merely moved one hand to wipe the

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sweat from his face, and (apparently without intention) shifted his position by an inch or two to where the sun, instreaming at the window, would just miss him and pass on to illuminate the stair head.

"Gulbaz *hai?* Gulbaz sahib *hai?*" croaked a hoarse throat from the stairs. A twisted lump of coal-black hair just showed above the topmost step, and then the question was repeated.

"Gulbaz sahib *hai?*"

The old Hindu clucked, and the new arrival ventured to expose his head. He looked singularly wild without his pugree—a yellow-skinned plucked eagle of a man, too wary to be altogether still, and swiveling one furtive eye perpetually downward, as if he feared enemies below. Where his other eye had been, a pinkish socket gaped in proof of Northern pleasantry; for when a Secret Service man gets caught he is sometimes offered some temptation to recant.

"Wouldst lose that second eye of thine?" wondered the ancient in spectacles.

"Nay, sahib, for I can not grow an eye, and I have no third eye. How, then, could I serve?"

"Crow on a carcass! No worse than now, with that sweet voice of thine! Sing thy foul songs to the sweeper's wife when the sweeper is in jail, and be silent on the stairs!

"Hast thou ever taken time enough, and thought enough, to think how it would feel were I to have that tongue of thine extracted by the roots? Suppose I had thee hung up by it from a hook? Dost doubt, thou, that the power is mine to order it?"

"Nay, sahib. I doubt nothing."

"Then art thou a greater idiot than ever! He who has any wisdom doubts all things—even death—until he has his fingers on the proof. Then, if he be truly wise, he maketh other men to doubt. Where is the food I sent thee for?"

The one-eyed ruffian unrolled his bundled pugree, shaking it and letting drop several little paper packages, fastened at one end as the vegetable sellers twist them; and from a fold of his loin cloth, which he had held most cautiously in one hand while he climbed the stairs, he produced a wooden bowl that reeked of spices.

"*Dall*, sahib, and *ghee*, and four *chupatties;* then a vegetable curry, very savory, and still warm from the cooking; sweetmeats, sahib, and a cigarette or two—I have been diligent in thy behalf, and generous!"

He alluded to the fact that he had not been paid yet, or had even been promised payment, but the suggestion that he had used his own money fell on utterly regardless ears.

"What hour is it?" demanded the toad-like Hindu. "So! Gone all this time? So long to steal a few hot scraps—and must needs brag and lie on thy return! There be two kinds of men—nay, three—who are better dead: they who know too much, and they who tell too much, and they who make too much noise—aye, and a fourth who think too much, and they are worse than any. The last, though, is a category that will never trouble thee—thou addle pate, of no shame and no modesty, and altogether no parentage!"

"But, Gulbaz sahib! Have I not served——"

"And I have fed this carrion bird upon occasion, and have wasted teaching on him! Robber of dung heaps, how often have I told thee that my name is no longer Gulbaz? What did I tell thee that my name is now?"

"But, Gulbaz sahib——"

The old man clicked his teeth and grinned diabolically. He was beginning to lose a little of his equanimity, and the pattern of the wrinkles changed. The one-eyed ruffian, peering at him sidewise past the streaming shaft of light, judged that it was time to yield a point or two.

"*Atcha!* Thou art Nawazish Ali, then, as thou hast said. But, sahib, thou art not dressed as a Mohammedan; thou seemest not to be one; and if I call thee so, and others hear me, and then see thee, they will mock me as a liar, or an idiot, or a plotter——"

"Thou art all three! Proceed. What else?"

"Sahib, why should I be made to seem unutterably foolish? Why should I call thee Nawazish Ali, when a thousand at the least know thee as Gulbaz here in Delhi? What have I done that I——"

The old man clicked his teeth again, and reached out for the bowl of curry.

"Enough of argument!" he answered quietly. "I will teach thee another lesson; there is time enough."

The other showed premonitory symptoms of alarm, but Gulbaz motioned to him to

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squat down, and reached out for the bowl of curry. He devoured it leisurely, and with something more than ordinary relish; neither age nor the exigences of intrigue would seem to have impaired his appetite.

When he had finished he picked his teeth stolidly, almost ruminantly, for a space of fifteen minutes; then eyed the one-eyed man as if he would look through him.

"Go, bring me Sookhum Lal," he ordered suddenly. "When thou hast brought him, go thy way. Thou art too big an addle head—too big a fool to teach!"

"Nay, sahib! Nay, Nawazish Ali! What, then, have I done? Have I not obeyed in all things, and risked too many things to name, and have I not kept silence?

"Nay, sahib! Sookhum Lal is but an ordinary liar, with ambition to become a knave but no courage in the matter. I am an honorable man!"

"What is my name, then?"

"Thy name, sahib, is Nawazish Ali. It never was any other name. It is a good name, a fitting name, a wonder of a name. It was thy father's name before thee——"

The old Hindu had ceased to take the slightest notice of him; he was bending above a little scrap of paper, and scribbling fast with a lead-pencil. In a moment he had screwed the paper up into a ball, and was staring once more at One-eye—this time, it would seem, almost with curiosity.

"In the matter of thy teaching," he asked suddenly, bending forward and extending an interrogatory finger, "who or what is God?"

The other stared back at him with one wide eye, and dropped his jaw stupidly. In all his service he had never yet been asked what his religion might be by his tyrant-master Gulbaz; he was not at all sure that Gulbaz had any.

"Thou patient ass! Thou basket bearer! Thou block for stopping blows! Thy brains are in thy belly, where thy food corrupts them, and the worms devour food and brains and thee!" (Gulbaz prided himself immensely, in his leisure moments, on his assimilation of Western thought, and on his use of Western epigram.)

"Thou four-footed mouth-and-belly—with what next shall I beat thee? If my name is Nawazish Ali, and thou (may all the gods of India pity me!) art my servant, what then, pray, is my religion and thine also?"

A ray of understanding seemed to flicker over the other's face.

"Who, then, or what, is God?"

"THERE is no God but God!" droned the other, rolling his one eye in ecstasies of imitative fervor. "Mohammed is his prophet! Oh, *Allah il Allah—Allah il akbar!*"

"So, enough! Take, then, this letter I have written to the place we know as Number Nine. Knock thrice. To him who opens, answer, 'There be leopards to be hunted.' He will ask, 'How many?' Tell him, 'Three.' Then he will admit thee. Give him the paper, receive what he gives thee, and return faster than thou camest last time!"

"And the order to bring Sookhum Lal is withdrawn?"

It seemed that when One-eye's honor was in question it had precedence of all obedience. Tacitly the older man also admitted it.

"Aye, for this last time it is withdrawn—until thy next foolish headlong indiscretion. But I have warned thee, and my patience has a bottom to it. There is the River Jumna—and there is Sookhum Lal, yearning to fill thy shoes. Remember!"

One-eye shuddered, bowed low, and was gone. On his way down he did not make one stair creak, and Gulbaz deduced from that that the man must have scouted very carefully before he ascended with so much noise. So he began to take less care himself—to shift his position, and to look about him, instead of gazing like an idol at the stair head.

Through the low, flat slit between the masonry that was so little like a window and so much like a vantage place for half a dozen riflemen he caught the sound of military music. He nodded as if he had expected it, and crept on all fours to the opening, hanging half way through it with surprising agility for one of his age.

A bird's-eye view of the helmets of half a thousand men appeared to fascinate him, for he watched until the sound of music and the measured tramp of feet died down in the distance.

After that he resumed his squatting attitude facing the stairs, grinning to himself at times and nodding, until One-eye came again—this time as silent as a ghost, and carrying a bundle wrapped in cloth.

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"Which way went the soldiers?" demanded Gulbaz, as if he did not know and had not watched them.

"To the railway, sahib."

"Good. Open."

Down on his knees, One-eye undid the wrapper and produced Mohammedan apparel for two men.

"Two *kullahs*, sahib, two Ludhiana *lungis*." He laid apart the two red, cone-shaped caps and the blue cloth stuff to be folded around them; one was of fine texture with an ornamental border for the mighty Gulbaz, and the other was a plain one for himself.

"Two *kurtas*, sahib, both white; one soft and good, the other as befits thy servant. Two *shalwas*, both of white; two cummerbunds; two *achkans*, one as befits thee and very splendid. The costumes are complete."

"Shave, then, my head and thine."

As a Hindu, Gulbaz wore no more hair on his head than the other—a topknot on the very crown of his shaven skull; it was the work of little more than a moment to remove both of them. Within a quarter of an hour they stood unrecognizable. Clothing, religion, attitude, and mannerisms changed together; their caste marks vanished, and there was nothing to betray them but their smooth, shaved chins.

"Open the little package," ordered Gulbaz, and the one-eyed man unwrapped the last of what the greater had contained.

A false beard, put on as skilfully as Gulbaz knew how to do it, with the aid of little bottles full of some adhesive stuff, and stains to darken the skin a little around the edge, is indetectable except by actual force; even then the skin would have to come with it, if any one should try to wrench it off.

"Now are we Mohammedans!" said Gulbaz, giving a few final touches to his servant's face, and seeing that he rolled up the Hindu clothing to be stowed under the eaves. "Now, what weapons hast thou? Show them."

One-eye raised his hands, and crooked his iron fingers into hooks that could have torn the throats out of two men with scarcely an effort.

"They are good. What others?"

One-eye flaschd his teeth—long, wolf's teeth, yellow with age and service, but firm and bright. Most natives' teeth are whiter than the whitest egg, and there was something horrible about the unexpected yellowness of One-eye's fangs.

"They are good. But I need to see thy weapons, not thy beast marks."

One-eye shook his head.

"I was stripped but now, sahib. What other weapons had I? Nay, I have no others. God be my witness that I have no others!"

"So. That is good. So shouldst thou answer, when another asks thee. But now I ask. Show me thy weapons."

One-eye shook his head.

"I am a poor man, sahib; wherewith should I buy weapons? Also, I am poor, and who would rob me? For what, then, would I need them?"

"Thou belly-brained abomination, show me! None? None in truth? Then strip thy clothing off and go—bring hither Sookhum Lal! He will not come weaponless, whatever be the venture! He will leave nothing to the care of fate. He will come ready to protect me. Go—I have ordered. Bring me Sookhum Lal!"

"Nay, sahib! Here! See, I have weapons—good ones; two of them!"

With a sudden movement of both wrists he produced, apparently from nowhere, a long steel sliver in each hand. They were all of eighteen inches long apiece, nearly as thin as skewers, and as sharp at the point and along one edge as razors.

"See, sahib—these let life out quickly, and leave little mark!"

On the instant his taskmaster's face changed from mere contempt to livid anger.

"THOU princeling of pollution!" he growled at him. "Thou ditch-born dog! Thou brainless, shameless, senseless, godless fool! How often have I ordered thee, and lectured thee, and taught thee NEVER to produce thy weapons unless a man must die?"

"But, sahib, thou——"

"Silence, thou breath of vultures! I tried thee, and I found thee worthless! What is Regulation One? Repeat it!"

" 'Fighting is to be avoided whenever possible. To run is better than to fight, and weapons are for self-defense, not show,' " repeated One-eye.

Like every other member of the most amazing force on earth, he had had drilled into him in his probation period the first elementary principles of his new creed.

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For the Indian Secret Service is a creed, with a caste all its own, owning no fealty to any other. The men are not known to the magistrates, and few are known even to the police; if they should happen to be arrested for having weapons they would get short shrift, and no one would come to their assistance should they be accused of killing.

The Secret Service stands alone, and its rules, which are not written, have been drawn and handed down by word of mouth accordingly. Not even the eagles own a sphere so vast; no mole digs faster or more secretly; and nowhere—nowhere, in a world all parti-color with the stains of pride—is there any such a pride of service.

One-eye (his only name was a numeral, written in red ink on the top left-hand corner of a ledger, locked away in a dingy little office up at Simla) hung his head in shame, for his offense had been too elemental for excuse. Suddenly his tormentor reached out and grabbed one strip of steel, twisting it free with a strength of wrist amazing in a man so old. He took One-eye completely by surprise.

Deliberately Gulbaz weighed the knife, wrapping a cloth around it and holding it by the blade. Then, ten times in quick succession, he struck One-eye with the hilt, selecting painful places as a musician might select piano notes when picking out a melody.

"Remember Regulation Two!" he advised, emphasizing each syllable with an extra blow. "What is Regulation Two? Repeat it."

"'Leave no evidence behind,'" repeated One-eye.

"Dog! And is this knife of thine not evidence? Son of a nameless mother, would it not go hard with thee, were that identified as thine? And is it not here in my hand? Is there not another in thine other hand that matches it? Is that not evidence? There—take thy tool, and hide it on thee, and beware lest I trick thee again! Next time——"

Once more One-eye saw fit to shudder, as his weird knife vanished up his forearm. The shudder might have been from fear, or from relief, or it might have been part of the trick that sent the weapon out of sight. Nawazish Ali, late Gulbaz, wasted no time on analyzing shudders.

"Come!" he ordered, making for the stair head. "Go thou ahead. Nay—wait! What is thy name, now?"

"Sahib, I am but a number."

"What, then, is thy number? I have forgotten it."

"Nay, sahib! Not again! Not thus do we of the Service ask!"

"How many miles came we to Delhi?" asked the ancient with a grin.

"Nay, sahib, but I never in my life left Delhi!"

"How many miles came Akbar, then, to Delhi?"

"Sahib, there were some said eighty-eight."

"What sayest thou?"

"I have heard eleven different versions of it, sahib."

"So. Then, Ninety-nine, thy name is Akbar from now until I bid thee change it. Forward—making no more noise than can be helped!"

CHAPTER III

In seeking information, three
General working rules there be:
Who to tell is nothing loth
Lies, or doesn't know, or both.
He who smiles and seems to know
Prays to Vanity. Grin and go.
He who listens with surprise,
Claiming ignorance, knows—and lies.
—Gulbaz to Beginners.

"MAN identified as Gulbaz found dead, sir, poisoned, lying face downward in a street off the Chandni Chowk," said Martineau, accepting a nodded invitation and dropping into the next chair to Ebbert's. He had drawn the Commissioner's office blank, and it is one of clubdom's virtues that a mere policeman and a Commissioner may meet there, even in India, on nominally equal terms.

"Oh! Which Gulbaz? Not——"

"Yes, sir. 'Fraid so. Constable identified him less than five minutes after I found him."

A man may educate himself to indirectness and evasion in the Indian Police as easily as in any job on earth, more particularly if he has ambitions for the Secret Service.

Martineau watched the Commissioner sidewise very narrowly. He deemed his own private opinion as to the dead man's identity exclusively his own, unless and until he should discover some one else who

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shared it. Ebbert seemed to be receiving news.

"You don't mean it! This is awfully unfortunate, Martineau; you can't imagine how awkward it is. The Grand Duke is due to get here a little before six—it's after four now, and no time to alter plans. I'd counted on Gulbaz to keep a keen eye lifting for the Grand Duke's safety."

"Well, sir, there are others!"

"Yes, but you don't understand me. The Grand Duke bears a certain reputation—they're all about the same, you know—they call it looking 'round for local color. Gulbaz was the one man in India to have piloted him safely through the places that he'll want to visit. This is nothing less than a disaster."

"I can fill the breach, sir, I expect."

This time it was Ebbert who looked sidewise, blowing cigarette rings, and pretending to be interested in the punkah overhead. He saw that Martineau was hawk-eying every move he made, set that down (perhaps) to youthful ambition and desire to seem awake, and thenceforward studiously looked away.

"Do you know anything about—ah—about the—ah—sort of places?"

"The police are supposed to keep pretty well in touch with everything, sir."

"Yes, yes. But about the Grand Duke. Ah—the situation's delicate. A Grand Duke's not an ordinary mortal—can't be allowed to get into trouble, and yet can't be ordered about. Needs very careful handling—very."

"Know anything about Yasmini, sir?"

Martineau had had it in his mind to keep what he knew about Yasmini to himself as well; but it occurred to him that Commissioners—particularly such as could give Gulbaz orders—were not illimitably ignorant. At least, he thought it would be better to throw out a feeler.

"I've heard of her, of course. Who hasn't? I imagine she would interest the Duke immensely. But—ah—do you know her well enough to—ah—make the introduction?"

"Yes, sir, I think so. I stand fairly well with her."

He said it with becoming diffidence, but Ebbert could not help but detect an undertone of pride.

"Know much about her?"

"Only what the rest know: that she was a Rajah's wife—not sure which Rajah; that she's said to have more than a drop of Russian blood in her veins. And that may be true, for her hair's golden, and don't look as if it's dyed; and her eyes aren't like those of any native woman I ever saw. That's about all, sir, except that she's Yasmini. There's nothing else like Yasmini anywhere."

"So Gulbaz told me more than once. Well, from all accounts she's able to take care of herself, and that's something.

"I confess I don't like this tampering with native women; even in the case of a foreign Grand Duke it's demoralizing, and lowers us in the eyes of the natives. But I don't see any way out of it. On the whole, it's fortunate that we have a woman of her unusual type, who can—ah—possibly keep him entertained and—ah—out of mischief."

The Anglo-Saxon seldom shows excitement under sudden stress—particularly not the type who gets to be Commissioner; he has to be worked up gradually, as a rule, before he will shake his fists and thunder, "Oh, my God!" This is more noticeably so in India, for there there are native servants who might see and carry tales. A man restrains himself.

Then, too, the Secret Service is associated rather intimately with reports of sudden death. In cases like that, a line is drawn across a page in a little thumb-marked ledger, and there are not many questions asked; the sub-heads of that Department (and nobody ever quite knows who they are) get used to dispensing at short notice with a trusted man and seeing some one else sent up to fill his shoes.

Martineau was well aware of all of that. He knew quite well that the slight effect his information *seemed* to have on the Commissioner was nothing at all to go by.

And he had his suspicions about Ebbert, but no more. As Commissioner, the Secret Service might quite possibly report to him, and even take orders from him in certain matters, without his being really on the inside. Martineau waited, watching points.

"Yes, Martineau," continued Ebbert, after five minutes of reflection, "you'd better make arrangements, if you can. See her tonight, and ask her to entertain the Grand Duke; then, if she agrees, and it's necessary, we can guide him up there.

"We shall do our best, while he's here, to keep the Grand Duke busy—there'll be

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receptions and a durbar and dinners and sports at the gymkhana, and every bally thing ingenuity can possibly devise. Yasmini will be a last resource.

"But there's the crowd that's with him, and they're going to be more nuisance than he is; the Duke trots a secretary along with him—a peculiar sort of a professor person, who writes the book the Duke intends to publish. If the worst comes to the worst, somebody'll have to take charge of the professor, and perhaps take him to Yasmini's."

"I could manage that, sir," said Martineau—again with diffidence, but again with a quiet note of triumph underneath.

"Well, you must do your best. I'm more than upset about poor Gulbaz; for believe me, Martineau, if there's one unremunerative proposition under the sun it's a Grand Duke with a knife between his shoulder blades. Remember—we can't any of us be too careful. What did you do about poor Gulbaz?"

"All I could, sir. Had the body identified and taken to the morgue. If nobody claims it—he's a Hindu, I believe—it'll have to be burnt tomorrow."

"Did you set any inquiries afoot?"

"Indirectly, yes, sir. But I thought it better to report to you before making any fuss."

"Quite right, Martitneau, quite right. Well—I must refer the matter to the proper quarter before I can give you further instructions on that point. Better keep quiet about it until you hear from me. I must hurry away now, and get ready for the Grand Duke. Good afternoon."

"So he's on the outside!" chuckled Martineau, hurrying away. "Has to ask for orders from higher up! Doesn't know a thing!"

He picked his pony out from among the thirty and odd that were waiting outside the club, and rode off jubilant, still muttering to himself.

"If I can get in on this—and there's something big on foot or I'm a Dutchman—if I can find Gulbaz and get in on his little game, I'm a Secret Service man from that day forth for ever more, amen; and may the good Lord love a mere policeman!"

BUT over at his quarters Ebbert the Commissioner was not in such a hurry to get dressed as he had given Martineau to suppose. He made time to interview and argue with a Hindu *moonshee,* who had sent a curious message in to him, and would not go away without an answer. The *moonshee,* so far as Ebbert's servant heard and according to his chatter in the kitchen afterward, was a very plaintive person.

"And the sahib said he would pay me rupees thirty per month, but now he pays me nothing; so I beseech your Honor humbly to investigate on my behalf."

"Oh, take your story to a *vakil.* Go to the District Court and ask for a summons—it's none of my business," grumbled Ebbert. It was then that the servant went out of hearing.

"Tell Gulbaz that everything is all clear. Has he got an assistant with him? Some one to protect him in case of need? Ninety-nine? Oh, very well. Who was the dead man? Don't know, eh? Um-m-m!"

The servant came hurrying back with Ebbert's boots.

"No. I can't do anything about it. It's a case for the District Court. *Moonshees* should have a definite agreement before they undertake to teach a sahib to pass in languages. No, take your trouble to the Court and be off with you—I've no time to talk. Go away, now—go away!"

CHAPTER IV

Drink, Inquisitive, drink thy fill!
Drink where waters deep and still
Gather and gain; or lave thy face
Down where the squabbling rapids race.
Choose thy dipping-place—drink thy fill!
The Secret River will roll on still!
Drink thy fill o' the Secret River;
Wet thy will i' the Secret River;
Slake thy thirst! The Secret River
Reaches the Sea in secret still!
—Yasmini's Song

THE Grand Duke had a great reception, such as only India can give. The streets were packed with many-hued and many-smelled humanity, and the road was lined two deep on either hand with troops, mounted and foot—native and white alternating.

Martineau, after giving certain hurried orders at the police office—orders that were not to be entered in the day book on the desk—filled his part of the grand *tamasha* by working his way in and out, and here and there and everywhere amid the tiptoed crowd. Almost any crowd can vomit forth

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a bomb for a Grand Duke, and for more than an hour he kept two gray eyes busy making sure that no small section of that particular crowd looked "too dashed innocent."

He was far too much occupied with his apparent sinecure to notice Yasmini's carriage amid the swarm of others that were crowded in a dense line on the route, and he very likely would not have noticed it in any case, for it was like a hundred others.

Certainly he would never have approached it near enough to gain an inkling of the typhoon of criticism boiling up within. And because he did his duty on that occasion thoroughly and looked incessantly for danger that was not there, he missed a seeming minor happening or two which might have made him wiser.

There were others, though, who did hear the throbbing underhum of wrath below the bumping of the rubber tires. There were others yet, who noticed how on edge her servants' nerves were, and who laughed to see the two men on the footboard at the back venting second-hand profanity on anyone who blocked the way.

Even the two horses seemed to be aware of the wrath behind the whippletrees, and were treading tenderly, as if the paving of the street were eggshells and its underside a bottomless abyss.

Lalla Lal—and he knew, for he was one of the two men up behind—told Valgovind afterward in the tallow shop, at the back of Zada Lal's in the bazaar, that she had been swearing most because of what seemed fittest to everybody else concerned.

"They make a king of him!" she had uttered between tight-pressed pearls of teeth —or so he said. "How will he ever come to me, when they swathe him in ceremony as no prisoner was ever weighted down with chains? They are idiots — and English, which is altogether more, and worse!"

Valgovind vowed that he had seen the tiger-glitter of her eyes through the carriage shutter, at the moment when the Grand Duke passed her. But then, few believe Valgovind.

It is notorious that he always caps a story, however little he may know about it, and whoever tells it; it is more than probable that he was staring at the Grand Duke much too hard himself to have watched Yasmini's shutters; but his words help prove what even natives think about her eyes. They do not call them "evil," but they speak of them in terms of the superlative.

But Lalla Lal had more of her mutterings by heart, and was ready enough to tell them.

"They will fuss and trumpet 'round him until he has no moment to himself!" was one of them. And, "This foolishness is all the talking came to! It was but a hot wind blowing, leading nowhere!" was another.

Then, said Lalla Lal, when the Duke had been driven past, and Yasmini had just that second hissed the order to drive home again—hissing it so fiercely at the driver that he lashed the horses and all but ran over a woman of the *dhobie* caste—what should happen but that a one-eyed fool of a Mohammedan should seize the horses' heads and force them back on to their haunches?

"As though a Hindu *dhobie's* wife were his concern!" snorted Lalla Lal with reminiscent anger.

That is about as far as Lalla Lal's evidence is worth considering. He had plenty more to tell about it, but the truth is that from that time on he was too much occupied in threatening the one-eyed man, and calling deaf "constabeels," and saying "yes" to Yasmini, and being pompously and ludicrously incompetent, to pay much attention to the details of what happened.

The crowd surged around the carriage like a maelstrom; the troops deployed away and tramped past the little splash amid an ocean; the roll and wash of military might swallowed the lesser turmoil, and the eddy in the current ceased to be. Amir Ali, the Afghan, was about the only man who carried off anything resembling detailed recollection of the rest of it; and he told Taj Mohammed that evening, as they sat together in the darkest corner of Mirza's yard within kicking-distance, almost, of a string of horses.

They were droning (or rather Amir Ali was), as one hillman will when he finds another and has no blood feud with him—sucking alternately at one big hookah, their faces half hidden in the *shamlas* of their turbans. And Amir Ali thought too slightingly of what he termed the South to trouble himself to lie about its happenings.

"Truly, it was on this wise as I remember, having nothing more to think about and the matter being recent in my mind. I was

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standing to one side of the pavement, having seen the Prince go by and having spat at him, casting glances for my own amusement—and to my own shame, be it added—at the cow wife of a Hindu *dhobie*, a buxom woman though, big in the loins and strong of shoulder. And the *dhobie* had received a cuff across the mouth for certain insolence he dared address to me.

"The *dhobie* woman, enamored and bewildered by attention from a man like me, had about stepped underneath a pair of horses—was under their forefeet in fact, and as good as dead. I had actually turned away, not caring to associate myself with the troubles of any low-caste Hindu, male or female. I was still looking, to see whether she died hard or not, when what should happen, think you?"

"Who am I that I should guess?" growled Taj Mohammed. He liked to listen of an evening, and hated to be goaded into unproductive speech. "Ask me no riddles. Who am I, to tell what happened to a Hindu *dhobie's* wife? What judge am I of thy paramours? Tell thy tale and pass the pipe!"

And that was an awfully long speech for Taj Mohammed after dark.

"Rememberest thou that sheik — him who had been converted to the true faith up on our side of the Hills—to save his skin, no doubt? Him who traveled with our caravan—the dog, I mean, who borrowed three rupees from me on security of many promises, but forgot the loan before we got to Delhi, or rather, perhaps, remembered it too well and disappeared?

"Well, he and no other, that misbegotten dog, rushed at the carriage at the moment when a one-eyed ruffian (who was not with us of the caravan) ran forward and seized the horses' heads, thus—forcing them back upon their haunches."

"What think you?"

Amir Ali paused, to give his listener time to speculate on what was coming next.

"THINGS happened then quickly, and on this wise. The fellow—he who borrowed three rupees—Nawazish Ali was the name our people gave him, I remember now; though the devils ran away with his former Hindu name, for I can not recall it. He—that dog—butted into me, not as a ram butts, thus, with his head, but thus—as a bird might, with his wings; pushing me in front of him. He pushing me, understand!—until he nearly reached the carriage.

"I sprang aside, and in less than another second he would have felt my knife's point somewhere near his liver; but the one-eyed man I spoke of—he who had hurled the horses back—prevented me."

Amir Ali was silent for at least a minute, allowing his disgruntled Afghan conscience to linger lovingly around the thought of vengeance. He reached for the pipe, and took three long pulls before resuming.

"As I said, the one-eyed son of evil stopped me, rushing in, throwing himself at me, and pinioning my arms with a strength almost unbelievable. He actually held me there, and as I looked about me for a space to move in and break free, I saw what that dog Nawazish Ali did, and heard what he said.

"He stepped on the step beside the carriage door, whispering through the shutters, and I heard him say the one word, 'Yasmini!' I heard an answer, though I did not hear its purport.

"Then I heard him whisper — thus — hoarsely, as a man speaks when he is in haste and yet would not be overheard: 'He says all is clear. At thy house, then, three nights hence!' "

"In what tongue did he whisper?"

Taj Mohammed was growing interested at the suggestion of veiled intrigue.

"In the Pashtu tongue."

"Well? What of it?"

"This. How happens it that a sheik, a one-time Kafir, a swag-bellied Southerner, a wizened grape, a pauper, a borrower of three rupees, should make assignations—at *her* house, mind you—with one who, if the tales I hear be true, is fairer and cleverer and richer than any other woman to the south of the Hills?

"Hast thou not heard tell of Yasmini? Within three days, when these last two horses have been sold and I am ready to journey back again, I mean to hie me to Yasmini's, friend of mine, and satisfy myself on certain points."

"As to whether the point of a knife is sharp, and whether she can use thy money?"

Taj Mohammed was no ladies' man, although they tell of him that he has a feud beyond the border that was started by a woman. If you watch him closely, you may see him thumb the hilt of his long

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knife when a woman's name is mentioned, and if you ever get close enough to see the hilt you may notice that on the wooden part of it there is a quite considerable row of notches.

"I have little curiosity on the woman's score," lied Amir Ali, reaching for the pipe. "I know that my knife is sharp, and I am interested to discover now whether she is that same Yasmini with whom Nawazish Ali made engagements. I would see that dog again.

"I would whisper in his ear about those three rupees. And after I have got the three rupees again — but not before — I would remind him of that little matter of the laying hands on me this afternoon. Didst thou ever see a man die by the down blow, thus—between the collar bone and shoulder bone to the heart? It is a good stroke."

Late that night Amir Ali, who had reasons of his own for hating to ask questions, and was prospecting on his own account, bumped in the darkness into Martineau, and was thoroughly well kicked for his pains. That was the nearest that Martineau came just then to picking up the trail of things.

He went on up Yasmini's stairs, oblivious or at the most indifferent to Amir Ali's flashing teeth and more than muttered blasphemy, smiling to himself and humming little tunes. And Yasmini greeted him, came toward him, welcomed him—the smiling, sweet-tempered, mirthful Yasmini he had always known, and not at all the curtained vixen who had cursed between set teeth and glared through the carriage shutters.

"My lord is pleased to treat me as a friend!" she smiled at him. "How am I honored twice in one day? What is new?"

"Yasmini, listen! Are we friends? Are you and I friends in truth? I feel inclined to talk to you—to tell you confidences—and to ask you others."

She squealed with pleasure, and for at least the hundredth time he wished that either she were of his race or he of hers; for then he would have known just how to behave himself. He had a notion that two strong arms thrown around her would be an all but insuperable argument, and another notion that with his arms in that position a knife could slither awfully easily between his ribs.

She laughed, like a glass bell tinkling, as if she had read his thoughts; and the opportunity, if it had been one, was past. But she actually laid one hand on his shoulder, making him tingle to her touch, and led him as his ideal might lead a man—almost without his knowing it—into the inner room.

He had not realized that he was there until the fragrance of the cushions, the tinkling of stringed music, the sound of splashing water and the breeze—borne in through the big square window that showed a million stars pricked out in illimitable blue, the faint suggestion of tree branches moving just beyond the window, and the scent of garden things—all helped inform him.

YASMINI sat next him—golden-haired and jeweled, and arrayed in gauzy aura stuff—Yasmini at her most bewitchingest. Yasmini coiled herself, much as a she-cobra might, and then uncoiled herself, and lay face downward, head toward him, chin between her hands. Yasmini gazed at him, and two twin jewels glowed and gleamed and blazed as surely no other woman's eyes had ever done. Then Yasmini's low voice purred to him in Pashtu. She was not pretending now—she knew that he understood.

"Speak, Bahadur! Tell me."

He hesitated half a second; smiled to hide the hesitation, looking foolish where he thought he aped the Sphinx; and made up his mind to plunge.

"Nay, Maharanee—" he had never given her that title to her face before—"you first tell me. Afterward is my turn. We will each make confidences. Who was it who lay slain outside your door this afternoon? What was his name? Whence did he come? Who had him killed? Why was he killed? And where is Gulbaz? Tell me."

She laughed at him—low music, like the sound of water falling into nothingness—just a little gentle stream of cool water, flowing out of huge tankfuls in reserve (all cool and sweet). It made him wonder if there were anything she did not know.

"Am I, then, owner of the universe? Do I know all things? Does the sahib jest?"

"I'm very far from jesting; I'm in deadly earnest. Yasmini, did you ever hear of bargains with the devil? You've heard of most things. Are you a devil? You look like

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one—a beautiful, beautiful devil. Are you one?"

She laughed again, and let her eyes glow from their depths—waiting, as the devil waits. He could hear her breath come evenly between the double row of pearls; her lips were parted ever such a little; but her bosom rose and fell quite evenly where it rested on the divan between her elbows, and even in his own state of excitement he could judge that she was merely curious, and not excited in the least.

"Will you bargain with me, Yasmini?"

"Speak on, Bhadur. Once I heard of one who bargained with the gods. He bargained for a drink of water, and he offered all the world for it."

"Well? What happened?"

"Oh, the gods, if I remember rightly, laughed at him and kept the water and the world. Speak on, Bahadur."

"Listen, Yasmini."

The mystery of all those multi-colored lights glowing faintly through the smoky air, the tinkling instruments and low-toned conversation of the dancing-girls by the open window, the low ceiling, the rich, incandescent gloom, the black-dark corners, and Yasmini herself so close to him combined to have their own effect.

Martineau scarcely recognized himself. He lowered his voice. He would not have confessed, even to himself that he lowered it because he could not control it otherwise.

"You know what Gulbaz was—and is. You know he isn't dead—I'm positive you know it. You know he's a Secret Service man, and that I'm not. I tell you, Yasmini, I want to be! It's my one ambition. There's nothing else in the world I want but that, and you can help me to it. Help me, then, and name your price!

"I know you don't want money—I'm not insulting you. I know I couldn't borrow *and* steal *and* earn enough in all my life to make you blink your eyes once. That's not what I mean at all, and you know it, don't you?

"I mean that as a Secret Servant there might be—there would be—ways in which I might repay you. Answer, Yasmini."

"Speak on, Bahadur. I am interested. In what way may I help?"

The tongue she used is rich in niceties of grammar, and she chose her tense as neatly as she would have picked a jewel from a tray.

"You can tell me where Gulbaz is now, for one thing."

"Am I God, Bahadur? Does a pebble on the bank know where the stream has gone?"

"You can tell me what his game is. I *must* get in on this. Once I'm in on it, I'm a Secret Service man for all time—I can find my own way in, then! And they'd never try to keep a man out who knew enough to track down Gulbaz! There's something happening—some game afoot—that has to do with Grand Duke Peter. I'm here to find out what it is. Now come, tell me."

"What was it that the sahib said about a price?"

"I said there was no limit! None! On my honor, not a limit! You'll have but to ask me when I'm once a Secret Servant."

"Even to the point of telling *me* the secrets of the Secret Service?"

He leaned toward her closer—dangerously close.

"Why, Yasmini, we'll be in the thing together—understand? We'll be in partnership. Come, tell me; you named the price, and I promised. Tell me—who lay dead before your door, and where is Gulbaz?"

She smiled still—smiled at him with red, parted lips that the hill gods where she came from would have fought to kiss; smiled, smiled, and did not answer him.

"Yasmini, tell me! It's something to do with the Grand Duke, and—and what else? With the North? Tell me—are ructions cooking in the North?"

"I will ask, sahib," she said quietly. "What were the questions?" She seemed to be listening now. "Where is Gulbaz? Who was slain? What does Gulbaz? Is trouble brewing in the North? The North, sahib—who can tell about the North? Can any man?"

HE, TOO, heard a footfall now. A moment later, and an Afghan swaggered in, preceded and made much of by a maid—for no one ever came in unannounced. He scowled fiercely at Martineau, and muttered in his red-dyed beard; but a maid brought him colored sherbet to drink, and Yasmini smiled at him and began to dance.

In a moment he was watching her, and had forgotten the Englishman completely. Then Yasmini sang, and every other thing except one flute was still; at times it was

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not easy to decide which was voice and which was flute.

Brother, the Northern dawn is dim.
Stir up the embers, brother mine!
Brother, the Hills loom gray and grim.
Draw up the sheepskin, brother mine!
Brother, the way we came was long—
Brother, the turn we took was wrong!
Nay, but the gods get lost among
The Northern mountains, brother mine!

Martineau had never heard that song, but before a verse of it was done he felt that in some way he did not understand it was intended to refer to him. It puzzled him, and he felt depressed and mean, which puzzled him still more; for he felt sure that had the Afghan not come in he would have brought her to see reason.

Before a second verse had started though, three more rough-bearded stalwarts, from the slopes of Sikaram or even farther north, entered with a deal of fuss, and much mutual greeting, and a mock quadrille of offered and reoffered precedence. Martineau saw that his chance for that evening was altogether gone, and arose to take his leave, the four Northerners being at no pains to disguise their pleasure at the move.

"We meet again, though?" he whispered to her, as Yasmini made him over to a maid, to be smiled at and called extravagant names and led out to the street. "We meet again, and talk again—eh, what?"

"I live here," answered Yasmini, "and the sahib knows the way."

The night air and absence of all artificiality outside brought him to his senses somewhat. He began to think with more regard to the proportions and probability.

"I believe I fell down flat!" he muttered to himself. "I believe I failed as absolutely as a man can fail. She's simply laughing at me. She heard all I had to say, and promised nothing."

He would have had less doubt about it if he had known about the ringing peals of laughter—Yasmini's, beyond a possibility of doubt—that arose as soon as he was out of hearing. They were joined, too, by four other roaring throats; and grown men in the East laugh very seldom except when they are scornful—almost never just for mere amusement.

On the other hand, they might not have laughed so much had they been able to overhear what Martineau was muttering, or guess the conclusion that he reached.

"Maybe," he muttered. "Yes, maybe I missed that time, and perhaps she takes me for a fool. But there's this—I've the police to count on; and if she knows anything about it, then she's in on it. And if I catch any one, I catch her, too; and then—well, then we'll see."

He recalled the last line of her song, and started humming it—

"Nay, but the gods get lost among
The Northern mountains, brother mine!"

"Now, I wonder what, by the Ace of Spades, and the Great Horn Spoon, and the Big Lord Harry in the bargain, she meant by singing that so pointedly! Now I wonder—dashed if I don't! I wonder! And who were those hillmen? Well, that part's easy. I can find that out within an hour or two."

CHAPTER V

A committee of hell sat in judgment on Cassidy,
Probing the faults of his arrogant past.
"What shall be done to him? How shall we punish him?
What has he merited?" Satan had asked.
There wasn't a doubt of his wonderful wickedness;
Hell didn't hold a sufficient rebuke.
They reported there wasn't a penance would fit him, but
Satan said, "Reincarnate him a Duke!" T. M.

NOW many more than one Grand Duke has had a thundering good time in India; but then most of them have elected to travel either strictly incognito, or else at least so quietly that they might find time for amusements on the way. The Grand Duke Peter traveled in his full official glory.

One need only know as much of Grand Dukes as can be seen of them from behind the backs of soldiers in the street in order to be able to realize that if the Grand Duke had his choice he would very likely not have traveled, and would surely not have traveled with his helmet on. As royalty is forced to do, he was suiting the demands of governmental policy, and not his own convenience at all.

His Government—and it consisted of a swarm of other Grand Dukes, as well as some of the shrewdest financiers still to the windward of Tophet—had taken advantage of his favorite little vanity; had introduced Professor Bourgowitch to him, and had told a publisher to start on the announcements for the Duke's forthcoming book.

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Then, rather overlooking the most important factor in the case, which happened to be the Indian Government, it had given private but very definite instructions to Professor Bourgowitch, and had packed the ducal party off.

Everything fitted in, like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle; for just then there was a British Commercial Mission on its blatant and self-righteous way to Siberia. There was talk (for talk has not gone up in price) of new Commerical Treaties; and there was nothing being said at all about Jews and pogroms and the Greek Church, or even about lead mines. None of those subjects for discussion would be revived until next election time, when the non-conformist conscience would need pacifying.

It seemed preëminently practical, and an altogether worthy stroke of business and politics combined, to make the Indian Government accept the Grand Duke's visit. It was considered likely to make for the peace of nations; and although the Indian Government protested once or twice, it had to give way.

For there was a famine beginning in the Central Provinces, and the Viceroy and Council feared that they would have to ask Parliament for a grant in aid before the year was out; it was as well, in other words, to keep the Government at Home in a friendly frame of mind.

But there is nothing on earth so dreadfully practical as the Indian Government, or quite so sincere in every thought or word or deed. It lies as sincerely and with as far-flung purpose as it tells the truth, and it obeys the Government at Home with a precision worthy of a better cause, when suitable occasion offers. When occasion does not offer it is apt to "regret the omission of subordinates."

It seemed this was a suitable occasion; and, taking advantage—as the Psalmist says the wicked always do—of others' troubles, no doubt, the Russian Government laughed low and long and merrily. They had forgotten a few past lessons, and were due for another one at India's expense.

The Indian Government had not forgotten Baluchistan, nor the grim gray overcoats beyond Pamir, even if there were a mission on its way to fraternize up there to the north. It chose to outshine any commercial mission that there ever had been in the world, and to extend a hospitality to the Duke that he and his staff would not forget for years to come.

Bombay was *en fête* for his reception, and even the Grand Duke's secretary's valet left the city weary to the bottom of his being. Calcutta next awaited them, in frills and furbelows, and disgraced herself forever (as she always does) by turning up top-hatted and frock-coated to receptions; and receptions followed one another toe on heel.

When officialdom had finished there were merchants, in layers of classes one below the other, each class with a gild or an association of its own, and each apparently determined to wine and dine the Duke and talk to him.

There were tea growers' associations, for instance, who wished to present his Imperial Highness with a silver chest containing the most amazing tea, as proof that Russia ought to cease importing overland from China; and there were representatives of Chinese tea merchants come all the way from Hong Kong to undermine that advantage to their rear, and uphold the interests of the overland trade.

Then there were Russian subjects (mostly from the holds and fo'castles of British ships) who wished to feast their eyes on him, and kiss the ducal feet. Every single inhabitant of Calcutta who could read or write appeared to be obsessed with the desire to own an autographed likeness, and every single retail merchant in the city wanted audience and the ducal patronage.

Then there were all the hospitals and all the missions. It was chiefly the professor who was treated to a dose of those. Of course the book was to be the Duke's, and he had to go through the formality of passing through the different buildings, but it was unofficially understood that Professor Bourgowitch would do the actual work and write it.

So the Professor had to become conversant with the details, and there wasn't any time left over to show him around the horse traders' stables that he wanted so much to see. He was fed statistics, and then asked to quote comparative statistics of the Russian charities, to make quite sure that his mind was occupied.

The Duke, with characteristic British undervaluation of an enemy, was not supposed to have a mind to occupy; but he was kept physically active until he swore—

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almost on the edge of tears—that he was not an English lord; that he thanked his God for it; that he never would be one; that he did not propose to be treated like one and be a Barnum & Bailey's Show all by himself; and that he would go home in a huff unless deputations and processions and the pink teas ceased.

So the Indian Government (and it is dreadfully resourceful) remembered that the thing to do in Rome is what the Romans do. Conversely (and is the East not converse?) the proper thing in India to do with an Imperial Grand Duke is to set him to Grand-Duke-ing. Duke, it was recalled, means General. And so the real fun began.

THE Grand Duke Peter had been able to review as many troops as his heart could wish for from the day when he first sat up in his perambulator. He had reviewed them by the hundred, by the thousand, by the hundred thousand, and by the million—his own troops, too, from a province of his own, in whom he consequently might be supposed to take some sort of interest. He had reviewed them until the sight of troops made him physically sick.

He was a sturdy enough man, somewhere in the neighborhood of six feet high, and framed and muscled like a panther; but reviews to him meant a sick headache underneath a bullion-weighted helmet in the sun, on a horse that would not stand still.

The very mention of the word review was anathema. It meant a stuffy uniform, a hard, uncomfortable military saddle, heavy thigh boots much too tight, a pair of corsets that made his eyes bulge, and a grin.

The grin was the only easy part about it, for he had had that drilled into position when a child and it was automatic nowadays. He grinned most when he was angriest, and the illustrated papers always edited the thing, and changed it to a smile.

From now on there were reviews at all hours, under all conceivable conditions, of all kinds of troops; and all for no apparent reason in the world except to give the Grand Duke pleasure, and his professor-secretary-person opportunity to dissertate about them in the forthcoming book. The Grand Duke Peter lost his temper finally, and left Calcutta for Delhi positively grinning from ear to ear, he felt so savage. He promised himself a little relaxation in the ancient capital of India, and even threw out hints that he might stay longer than had been intended.

He threw out suggestions about sport, and it was instantly explained to him that the honored guest of the Indian Government had only to express a wish to find it instantly fulfilled. Wearily and equally politely he answered that he would be satisfied to leave it all to his hosts; but none the less he sent an apparently inconsequential personage on ahead of him to look the country over.

That was rather rude, of course, but when a Grand Duke chooses so far to forget the niceties of good behavior men look the other way. And the inconsequential personage traveled to Delhi with no less than four equally unofficial supervisors, who made him very comfortable, but who laughed in his face when he suggested getting off the track. As had been the fate of the Professor in Calcutta, he did not succeed in getting to the horse dealers' stables, and when the Grand Duke reached Delhi he found his advance agent wiser in only one particular.

He had discovered that the Government of India is something more than circumspect; only he called it perfidious, and as Napoleon did before him, pronounced the word in French.

But the Grand Duke Peter did not care. He considered he was through with military reviews, so he was happy. He arrived in Delhi almost with an appetite, and actually looking forward to a little life.

However, for an hour or two before his train came in, the whole of Delhi had been thundering to the measured tramp of men. India was made for unexpectedness, and was fixed so by the British, not altered; so from nowhere and from everywhere, from a dozen unexpected streets and apparently a dozen different directions, a brigade assembled to the brazen blare and thunder of its bands and the glitter of accouterments. Long before the Grand Duke and his smile had reached the station the square in front of it was a sea of helmet spikes, and the shock of the royal salute they gave him reverberated like the welcome of a couple of divisions.

So the very first thing he had to do in Delhi was to inspect his bodyguard. It took him fifteen patent-leather-booted minutes. And he reasoned, not illogically, that if a ducal bodyguard consisted of a whole

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brigade of troops, then the proportion of soldiers waiting to be reviewed at Delhi, too, must be disgustingly enormous. One achieves a new respect for royalty when remembering that in spite of everything the Grand Duke's language was still studiously pleasant and correct.

For not one second of that dusty journey had he been allowed to get away from glamour and servility and starched officialdom. At each considerable station where the special train had stopped he had been obliged to show himself, and smile and bow, and a deputation of some sort or another had waited on him to present a bouquet or an illuminated address. Once or twice a native deputation had insisted on the delightful (when you like it) custom of wreathing him in flowers; and when nothing else in the way of deputations was available the railway servants had evolved one of their own.

As a pretty general rule, some local big wig took a ride with him as far as the next stop, in order to introduce him to a new bore, who, in turn would ride with him and introduce him to another one. In fact, as the Government of India intended that he should, he had talked platitudes for twelve long hours on end.

He had been treated as India and any other truly democratic country has a right to treat all royalty. He had no single, logical, reasonable or legal ground for objection or complaint, and he was fuller of undiluted, yellow-toothed, venomous, devouring hate than a porcupine is of quills.

The distance-signals outside Delhi had revived his hope of peace and quietude to come. His smile might even have been momentarily genuine. But the sight of all that guard of honor dashed his hopes again and raised his ducal gorge. But he still smiled and was polite. He was still royalty.

He had a smile left for the assembled ranks of Thomas Atkins, and he still smiled as he strode between them, pretending to admire their trimness; but his breath came in long, uneven drafts that hissed through his teeth. He let himself be driven to a hall where an official reception awaited him and where he would have to shake three hundred people by the hand before he could go to dinner; and he was still smiling. There was no change visible in his demeanor.

He endured the whole reception. He endured the dinner afterward. He made a speech in which he addressed those present as "fellow men," and he listened to a lot of other speeches that must have bored him to the verge of desperation; but he smiled, and there was beginning to be something not quite set, not quite insipid, not quite meaningless about the pleasure he displayed. He was smiling with his eyes as well as lips, and looked almost hopeful.

"We've got to admit he's a good game sportsman, anyhow," said a Lieutenant-Governor, who had taken more than common interest in watching symptoms. "We'll have to pay his Imperial Highness the compliment of taking infinite precautions. A man who can keep his end up that way and still *look* cheerful, is a man to be considered. Mark my words!"

TWO hours after dinner had dragged out its insufferable course the Grand Duke was permitted to go off to bed—accompanied, of course, by half a troop of cavalry. It is fair to presume that he slept, for they changed guard often enough to make any man feel quite sure he was safe, and the noise of challenges and sharp command was one continuous lullaby. But next morning, from the sacred sanctum of his bechamber, he gave out the ducal ultimatum, and justified to the full the words of the Lieutenant-Governor the evening before.

Though he would not have admitted it for half his income nor for half the income of the Indian Government, he had set out now to prove how slightly one needs probe them after all to prove that dukes and bricklayers are brothers, with but a single point of view. He had set his ducal foot down and refused to be a scab. His name, henceforward, could not be inscribed on the list of ducal blacklegs. He would not work overtime. He had proclaimed a strike.

Of course, since he owned no proper union he could not express himself exactly as his brothers of the cellars and foundations do; but what he did say amounted to exactly the same thing, and it was recognized as such.

He said that he was sick. He said that he was much too ill to leave his bed, but not sufficiently ill to need a doctor.

Long, curling columns of cigar smoke could be seen uprising from the veranda

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of his room. A pair of neat morocco slippers swayed in close proximity to the open-work veranda masonry, and a gorgeous dressing-gown that no one less than a Duke would have dared to wear was evident to all the world, throwing back his glory at the Indian sun from the depths of an arm chair.

Plenty of a most distinguished brand of dry champagne was rushed to the ducal chamber, and it was given out, proclaimed, and accepted as a ducal fact that his imperial Highness Peter was in his bed, and too ill to get out of it. The telegraph wires between Delhi and Calcutta hummed to the tune of the secret cipher code, and from Calcutta the sending-instruments clicked the news and clicked again to a listening world. The world sat up and sent its deepest sympathy; and India—official, pompous, and "perfidious"—winked the other eye (the more perfidious one), and smiled in its official sleeve.

"Of course," smiled a Lieutenant-Governor, "it would have been better for every one concerned if we could have simply kept him busy and prevented it. But I said last night he was a downy bird, and so he is.

"Well, there's only one thing now, and that's to let him go ahead. Give him lots of rope and keep tight hold to the end of it. You'll have to hold the rope, Ebbert, and I think I can safely leave it to you."

"I think you can, sir," said the Commissioner.

"Gracious Heaven!" sighed the Lieutenant-Governor thankfully, "but I'm glad I wasn't born to the purple! Think of having to do dirty work for a Russian Government! Think of having to smile through it all and take the blame, and brazen it out afterwards!

"And, mother of me! Think of the fun of being found out! Poor, suffering, helpless devil, but I'm sorry for him! Well, go on, Ebbert; go ahead; mark the knots, hold one end tight, and give him all the rope he wants."

"What's interesting me most," smiled Ebbert, "is guessing what it is that he's going to find out."

"Yes? I could write down here now, in one minute, just exactly what he's going to find out, names and all. I don't believe I'd miss one name."

"Oh, is it as simple as that?"

"It isn't very simple. It's important, too."

"Ah—worth discovering?" asked Ebbert.

"Oh, certainly." The Lieutenant Governor arose to go. "Call on me at once if you're in difficulties, and be sure to give my compliments and all that kind of thing to his Imperial Highness. Tell him I'll hope to see him again as soon as he's well enough to be about."

Nineteen guns announced the Lieutenant-Governor's departure, and then the Commissioner "allowed himself the honor of announcing" to the Duke that in view of his Highness' unfortunate indisposition and the pressing calls of duty, the Lieutenant-Governor had reluctantly been forced to cancel all arrangements for the ducal entertainment for the next few days. He trusted that his Imperial Highness would appreciate with what reluctance the course had been decided on, and how nothing less than the most pressing affairs of State could have induced—etc., etc., etc.

"I'd forgive the humorist who wrote that letter almost anything," remarked the Grand Duke, tossing the communication on the table and motioning to his secretary. "Convey my profound regrets that I should have missed seeing all the —— soldiers; ask after Mrs. Commissioner, if there is one—I honestly forget—promise nothing, and remain. Write it in English, and sign it yourself; say I'm too ill to hold a pen. Oh, and have another bottle of that champagne put ready on the ice, will you? Thanks."

Ebbert received the ducal note and filed it in its proper place. Then, instead of writing as he might have done, he called for his pony and rode in search of Martineau.

CHAPTER VI

Waste ye the hours, then, in seeking the honeycomb?
Wonder ye where is the store of the bees?
Seek ye the track of the gauze-wingéd laborers
Through the dim jungle and over the trees?
Sharp are the thorns, hard the rocks, weary ones;
Long are the leagues that the honeybees roam!
Rest ye! And trap you a bee, and give sweets to him;
Free him, and watch him, and follow him home!
—*Yasmini's song.*

ABOUT a hundred thoughts flashed through the mind of Charlie Martineau when Ebbert trotted into view, for as a very general rule some one is going to have his wool pulled when a Commissioner takes time to call in person. It is easiest to write and keep a copy on the files for future

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reference; but the more charitable course is to do what Ebbert nearly always did, and say things to a fellow's face. It bears better and less bitter fruit.

But in this instance Martineau's hastily aroused alarm and instantly assumed defensive state of mind were thrown away. Ebbert was smiling and a little enigmatic, but as unofficial and as far removed from cavil as the flowers in June.

"Busy, Martineau?"

Martineau glanced left and right at the high piles of printed forms and scrawled reports. His attitude was quite correct, for a policeman—noncommittal, ready on the instant to prove himself the busiest man in all India, or the opposite, as opportunity decreed.

"If you haven't got too much to do—too much, I mean, that calls for personal attention—if you could delegate official business to your subordinates for the next two or three days, there's something else on which you might be almost equally well engaged."

Confound him! Why the devil couldn't Commissioners learn to be explicit? Charlie Martineau most particularly wanted three days to himself, for he thought that in three days he could track down Gulbaz. And here was perhaps another opportunity, better than he could make for himself! Why couldn't Ebbert learn to get things off his chest? he wondered.

"Is it very important, sir?"

"Couldn't say, I'm sure. Things have a way of turning out important from the most commonplace beginnings; haven't you noticed that? Point is, are you busy?"

Forced against a wall, even a policeman can give an unequivocating answer; and Martineau admitted that he had enough to do, but could postpone all of it without much loss to Government.

"Then get your pony and come with me," said Ebbert, who could see through a stone wall as far as any man who lived; Martineau was altogether in the wrong in thinking himself the would-be mind reader.

Ebbert saw through the make-believe of giving hurried last-minute orders; and although he did not overhear Martineau telling a plain-clothes constable to follow him, and consequently did not suspect the move, he did detect a mental atmosphere of interruption. And he knew quite well that he had broken off some private move of Martineau's half way.

"What have you done about Gulbaz?" he asked abruptly, as Martineau mounted beside him and legged his native-bred into a walk.

"Nothing yet, sir. You remember, you said I was to await instructions from you."

"Quite so. Well, I'm told that—ah—another branch of the Service has the case in hand. Ah—I'd—ah—you'd better let it alone."

"Very well, sir."

"I mean just that. Let the case alone. Nothing at all to do with you any more. Get me?"

"Perfectly."

"All right. What I want you for now is another matter altogether. There's a Professor Bourgowitch—I think I mentioned him to you yesterday—sort of private secretary to the Duke. He's a restless sort of gentleman—wants to run around a lot and see things.

"No earthly objection to his seeing what he likes, you understand, but a very grave objection to his getting into trouble. Get my meaning? Well, I'm going to take you up and introduce you, and I want you to make friends with him and show him all over the place. Take him anywhere—be a sort of demi-official guide to him—see he doesn't get lost and doesn't get stabbed in the back, that's all.

"These Russians are sometimes apt to be a little high-handed with the natives, and you may have to use tact and all that kind of thing. Look after him, you know."

"Are there no restrictions on his movements, sir?"

"No. None."

"I mean——"

"Positively none. Take him anywhere—let him see, hear, or do anything. No restrictions at all."

"For instance, last night I mentioned Yasmini——"

"Very good idea. Take him there. If a sick Grand Duke who isn't sick is a white elephant, Martineau, his private Professor is a kalsomined mammoth—you may take that from me as Gospel. All you're required to do is to take him anywhere and keep him out of mischief. He's been put up for the club—all that sort of thing has been attended to. You amuse him."

"I had an idea, sir, that he might perhaps need watching."

"How d'ye mean?"

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"Why—er—aren't these Russians—— I er—I mean——Hang it! There's Baluchistan and — er — the Northwest Frontier, and——"

Ebbert laughed outright, and looked at Martineau quizzically—almost pityingly.

"*If* there were anything of that kind it would be attended to by the Political, Mr. Martineau. Your business will be strictly confined to looking after the Professor's personal safety."

Stung by the rebuke, Martineau lapsed into silence until they reached the palace where the Grand Duke and his staff were all immured behind a most observant guard of honor.

So he was a personal attendant, was he? A mere bodyguard to a stuffy professor person? Well, perhaps, he thought, he might yet find opportunity to show the whole crowd that he was something rather different.

He had half a notion in his head to send the plain-clothes constable after Ebbert, to watch what he did next and report; wild thoughts come into the heads of men who have ambition such as Martineau's.

He was in a brown study when they reached the palace gates, and did not quite regain his usual alertness until he found himself being pushed forward and introduced to the Professor.

"By the big brass Bangalorum, what a man!"

He nearly said it aloud, he was so astonished, and he did not quite recover for five minutes. He was standing up, this apparition, stepping toward him, and smiling at him through a shock of dun-colored, disheveled whiskers.

He wore a beard that came full half way to his waist, and there seemed enough of it to make three beards with; it stuck out in every conceivable direction, and looked as if it never had been trimmed at all; although each hair, strangely enough, seemed scrupulously glossy on its own account.

One doubled fist, as big as a knotted club, rested on his right hip pocket; one hand, stretched out to swallow Martineau's, looked as if Rodin might have carved it out of granite. It was freckled, and red hairs stood up along the back of it.

The fingernails were smooth and clean and polished, and made the hand look horrible by comparison; Martineau felt a distinct sense of repulsion at the thought of taking hold of it, and a moment later felt mad-angry as his own was crushed in a titanic squeeze.

"Very glad to meet you," said the Professor in quite good English; and for another minute the two stood still and looked each other up and down, Martineau fighting like a schoolboy between a wish to be rude and a hatred of admitting himself hurt, and the Professor unashamedly inquisitive.

"Well, I'll leave you two together," interrupted Ebbert, and Martineau forgot all about the orders he had meant to give to the plain-clothes constable who waited at the gate. "Give him the best time you can, Martineau, and show him everything. You'll excuse me, Professor, won't you? The office is waiting for me."

"I am interested very much in native horses," said the Professor, seeming to bend over Martineau, although he was not really much more than an inch taller. "If he would show me 'round some of the dealers' stables, now——"

"Why not take him to Mirza's stables first?" suggested Ebbert. "Well, good-by, Professor; I must be going."

FIVE minutes later Martineau sauntered out with the Professor at his side. He looked and felt insignificant, and was vaguely angry. The sight of his obedient plain-clothes man waiting at a corner made him angrier yet. Why had not the idiot gone away?

"We'll drive, of course?" he suggested, remembering the strings of various equipages provided for the Grand Duke and his staff. Either way, he imagined, he could vent his spleen on the plain-clothes man; should he see them he would have a run for it that would help condition him, and should he not see them he would be punished afterward for gross neglect of duty. He turned to give the necessary order to a liveried *chuprassy* at the door.

"No, let us walk," said the Professor. "I have had too much of driving 'round in state. By all means let us walk."

The Professor took no notice of the saluting sentry; he seemed anxious to get over in the shade and hurried, giving Martineau all he could do to retain his dignity and yet keep up with him. He headed straight for where the plain-clothes man was arguing with a one-eyed Mohammedan. One-eye was looking nasty and was making strange

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signals with his arm. As the two drew nearer he seemed about to make a rush for either Martineau or the Professor.

Still twenty yards away, Martineau saw fit to be discreet.

"Arrest that man!" he ordered, loud enough for the plain-clothes man but not loud enough for the sentries behind to hear. The obedient minion of the law closed in, but One-eye slipped around him.

It was the Professor he was making for, beyond a doubt; and he would have reached the Russian but for an elderly Mohammedan gentleman who stepped in just in time and interposed himself. He was old and not active, but he held the one-eyed ruffian long enough to enable the plain-clothes man to effect a capture.

"Take him to the lockup!" ordered Martineau, delighted at what he now remembered had been foresight on his own part. The Professor was trying to make clear his gratitude to the elderly Mohammedan, but without much success.

Martineau, eying the prisoner, did not see the Russian's hand go in his pocket; he only turned in time to see him offer the Mohammedan a folded bank note.

The Mohammedan was all outraged dignity on the instant. He grinned, which is never a good sign. He seemed almost about to spit, but looked at Martineau and thought better of it. Instead, he handed back the bank note with a muttered growl of execration and hurried off.

"You shouldn't have done that, Professor," explained Martineau. "Some of these native gentlemen, you know, are great sticklers for their dignity. Never tip any one in India without first knowing that he'll take it."

"I thought that perhaps he saved my life," said the Professor. "I would have liked to reward him."

"He'd have been satisfied with just a word from you. You made a mistake, that's all. Never mind. It's all over now anyhow."

"Ah!" said the Professor, with his hand again in his hip pocket. "I dislike to make mistakes. Perhaps it is better that we drive, after all; then I will make no more mistakes. Yes?"

So fifteen minutes later the two set out again—this time in a pair-horse carriage, but looking as unofficial as they could.

"Mirza's stables you said, didn't you?" asked Martineau.

"I said so, yes; but it is unimportant. Take me anywhere you wish. Let us see Delhi; let us see the city; anything of interest."

He had in his hand what the elderly Mohammedan had given back to him. It looked like a bank note until he unfolded it. Before long he pretended to consult a little pocketbook; and Martineau, watching with the eye in his ear that every policeman ought to have, noticed that between its open sheets was laid a sheet of crumpled paper bearing Persian characters. Martineau said nothing, but he remembered.

Later—perhaps an hour later, as they drove about the city, growing momentarily more familiar—there came a pause in the conversation, and Martineau saw fit to seize the opportunity.

"Know any Persian?" he inquired casually.

"No," said the Professor. "Why?"

"I wondered, that was all. You Russians are always said to be such expert linguists."

"No. I know no Persian."

"That's a pity," said Martineau. "I thought of taking you this evening to a place where more Persian will be spoken than any other language. You'd enjoy it more if you could understand what was said."

"Take me, none the less," said the Professor. "I can always find enjoyment anywhere."

CHAPTER VII

Brother, the Northern wind cuts keen!
  Eat of the wind, then, brother mine!
Brother, I'm faint and wasted lean!
  Bite on a thong, then, brother mine!
Brother, I'm weak and thou art strong;
I owe thee nothing—I did no wrong!
  Men pay each other's debts among
  The Northern mountains, brother mine!
—Yasmini' song.

NOW since it is no use asking Martineau, the only man who could throw light on the next link in the chain would be Amir Ali the Afghan. For reasons that seemed good enough to him he told the truth to Taj Mohammed, when he limped back that same night to Mirza's yard, a few hours after Martineau had kicked him.

"Where, then, was thy knife?" asked Taj Mohammed, sucking at the everlasting pipe, and showing only one eye and half his face from beneath the folds of a sleep-crumpled

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turban. "Had he no ribs to wedge apart, and thou no wrist?"

"It was that that started him—may God deal ill with his descendants unto ten generations! I had drawn my knife when the pig of an infidel first stumbled into me.

"He saw the knife—may Allah deprive his son and his son's son of their eyesight! He struck my wrist so, with his foot; then—hast thou eyes to see in the dark? Then, look—as my knife went spinning through the blackness to I know not where, for I never found it, he struck me thrice in the face with his knotted fist. I speak truth. There are the marks to see.

"Before I fell—nay, even as I fell—he kicked me again three times with his right foot, this time in the belly, till I lay and groaned, having no wind left in me and no desire to live.

"He went, then, through the little door that leads to hers—nay, it is no palace door. And I, after a great while as strength returned to me, began searching for my knife. It was a good knife, and had done service more than once."

For five minutes he consoled his injured feelings with the pipe that Taj Mohammed passed to him, and there was no sound except the pipe's bubbling and the stamping here and there of a half-awakened horse. Then he passsed the pipe back and continued:

"I did not find my knife, though I searched long and in each cranny. But soon—an hour, or perhaps two hours, after he had struck me—I heard steps returning down the stairs. I had seen many go up them—four men at the least, and all men of the Hills; but none had returned until this one, and I waited, hiding in the dark. It was he again and he did not see me."

"Hadst thou no other knife?"

"Aye, one other, but no courage. I followed him a little way, but there was great laughter from the rooms above, where he had been; and what with curiosity and with his keeping in the middle of the street, and with thinking that all things should be done in proper turn (for I had not forgotten Nawazish Ali yet, nor yet the three rupees), and what with wondering about Yasmini—I retraced my steps and entered."

He paused again. Once more Taj Mohammed passed him the bubbling pipe, and for five more minutes he sat still, squatted on his heels, remembering.

"Pass me the pipe back, and let thine imagination rest a while. Tell only of what happened."

Amir Ali chose to overlook the imputation.

"She is as they told me. She is wonderful. She is not as a woman of the hills, nor as one of the plains, nor as one of these *Feringhee* women, nor as all the three together. Neither is her voice like any voice I ever heard before.

"True, her hair is golden as is the hair of some of the *Feringhees* whom I have seen and heard of, yet she is not a *Feringhee*. Nor is she a devil, though her laughter is alone enough to stir grown men to madness.

"Aye, she is a sight for old men's eyes, and for young men's; and her dancing is like sin, my brother—a man can not look away."

"What said she?"

"She made me welcome. First, a maid met me at the stair head, and to her I said that I was injured and sought the charity of rest and soft cushions and a little ease.

"Then when she had left me for a moment in an outer room where many divans were and rich carpets from the North, and colored lights, and many strange-smelling scents, came Yasmini herself and smiled at me, and asked me what I needed. When I had found my senses, which were wandering because her beauty was so great and her smile so wonderful, I told her that I came in search of one Nawazish Ali."

"What then?"

"She asked me why I sought Nawazish Ali at her house."

"Well? And what saidst thou? Forward with thy tale! The hour grows late, and I would be sleeping."

"I said that Nawazish Ali told me he would meet me there."

"And what said she? Did the white sahib kick thee in the mouth, too, that thy speech halts?"

"She told me that I lied. She smiled while she said it, but she said it twice—nay, three times. She said, 'By that I know thou liest!' And she asked me again what I sought in her house. And I said Nawazish Ali.

"She bade me then wait a while, and returned to the inner room, where was much laughter and some music, and every little while some singing. I think that I sat there one hour; though perhaps it was longer. I am not sure.

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"Then she came again, this time seeming more lovely than before, and not as other women who are always uglier at second glimpse. With many smiles she bade me follow her, and I did—still limping more than a little, and none too upright. I went with her into the room within."

He reached for the pipe; but Taj Mohammed thwarted him, waving his hand away.

"Tell first thy tale. Thou art over-long about it!"

Pipe or no pipe, Amir Ali chose to rest his eyes upon the star-pricked sky and dwell in memory a while before he condescended to proceed. In the end Taj Mohammed passed him the thing, and so lost five more minutes of effort trying to conceal his interest.

"I have seen no such room anywhere," said Amir Ali finally. "Nor can I tell the tenth of it, nor yet the hundredth part. It is such a room as only she would think of, and it is fit for her as the green leaves fit the blossom. Only the room is in no sense green, but golden and all other colors except green."

"What happened?" growled Taj Mohammed impatiently, but Amir Ali ignored him.

"There were seated there five others—four whom I had seen go up there, and a fifth whom I did not see enter, but who was evidently one of them. There was a seat between them, having two and two on either hand. But that seat she left empty, leading me to another one that faced them, and in such a way that the lights—which were many in that part of the room—shone full on my face; putting me to shame, what with my bruises, and leaving the rest of the room in near darkness. I was seen by all, but could not well see them."

"What said they to thee?"

"Nothing. They talked a little among themselves, but for the most part they were satisfied to see her dance and hear her sing, as indeed I was."

"And what said she?"

"Nothing."

"What happened, then?"

"NOTHING happened, except that she danced and sang; and her maidens danced and sang—though not so well as she. And then there was another knocking at the door, and one came in, preceded by a maid, whose face was hidden by his *shamla*.

"I saw that he was a Northerner, but naught else. Yasmini caused him to be seated near by me and a little to the front of me, and all that I could tell about him would have been as much as the fish told Yussuf Ali. Rememberest thou that story?"

"Surely I remember it. Forward with thine own tale!"

"I said, it would have been as much, but for this one thing——"

"What? A man would think that thou wert paid, so sluggish is thy tongue! What thing?"

"Yasmini, she herself, came over to me, and stood before me laughing, until all eyes in the room were on me——"

"Wondering at thy beauty, beyond all doubt!"

"——And in a voice that would have charmed a snake she asked me once again why I had come."

"So, snake out of a hole! And what saidst thou?"

"I told her again that I had come to find Nawazish Ali."

"And she believed thee this time?"

"Nay, I know not. She pointed to him who had come last, and laughed, and said, 'There is Nawazish Ali!' And the man turned, and lo, there was he—beard and eyes, and pouting lips and all."

"Ah-ha! So he felt thy knife after all! Thine other knife was handy at the moment?"

"Nay, I spared him yet, for her house is not mine, and for aught I knew the others were his friends. I had drunk her sherbet, and had rested me amid her cushions. Nay, I shed no blood in her house, although I doubt not that my eyes told something of my will to do it. Nay, I said nothing, leaving him to speak."

"And what said he?"

"He rose. He came toward me, so that I clutched my knife and made me ready. But he halted when he had come within the reach of a rather longer knife than most men carry, and peered at me between those keen-appraising eyes of his, looking as I never yet saw man look.

" 'Thou knowest me?' he asked.

" 'Aye,' said I, 'I know thee. Thou art Nawazish Ali, and thou owest three rupees.'

" 'So,' said he, 'and canst thou prove the debt?' "

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"Ha!" laughed Taj Mohammed. "There he had thee! Where was indeed thy proof?"

"I answered him: 'I have no proof beyond thy promises, and my ability to make thee rue the day we met! I helped thee,' I told him, 'when thou wast with the caravan, because I was a fool and believed thee honest. I will be repaid because thou art a craven, and I a man of mettle! So,' I said to him, 'so will it be done, and I will have my money!' "

"A brave boast!" assented Taj Mohammed. "And what said he to that?"

"He was all fear on the instant, as I had thought he would be at the mention of reprisals. These once-Hindus are Hindus still, and craven; for it is only Allah who puts courage in the hearts of men."

"*Allah il akbar!*" assented Taj Mohammed.

"He was all a-stammer and a-flutter and a-gasp on the instant. 'I will pay thee—surely I will pay thee!' he blustered. But I remained just as I sat, smiling to myself and saying nothing.

"I have no doubt at all that Yasmini was much taken with my dignified behavior, and that it offset to some extent at least my disadvantage in having my features disfigured by the beating that I had received. She began to laugh and sing, and the song she sang was applicable to the case in some ways, although not, I think, in certain others.

"I know not what she meant about a brother. Perhaps that was the wording of the song, and could not be altered. She sang; and Nawazish Ali, pig of a one-time Hindu that he is, stood trembling before me."

"What said the other men?"

"Nothing—deeming it no doubt the part of men of wisdom not to interfere in the affairs of one quite capable of attending to them. After a little while, when I had had enough of his discomfiture and found no more amusement in it, I told Nawazish Ali that I was ready to receive the three rupees—with interest. I laid considerable stress upon the interest, being minded to take that in a way he does not contemplate."

"Well? Did he pay thee?"

"Nay. The dog did not have it, although his altered raiment gave token of greater prosperity than was his when he trudged with us down the Khaibar. He said that he would bring it to me before dawn, if I would but direct him where to come. So I told him where to find me at any time between my leaving there and daybreak, and had done with talking to him.

"I was interested more in seeing her dance than in amusing myself with that creature's fear of me. But she had finished dancing, being tired I doubt not; and soon she sang us that farewell song that the Northern women sing, so that I judged it courtesy to take my leave. Knowest thou the song?

> "Belovéd, listen! When the breezes
> Whisper through the deodars—
> When the snow-kissed mountain breezes
> Whine below the steely stars—
> Hear, belovéd, when the wind voice
> Murmurs through the mountain rain;
> Belovéd, thou art not forgotten,
> Come, belovéd—come again!"

"Aye, I know the song," said Taj Mohammed; and that was not true, for the song was Yasmini's, and neither of the two had ever heard a word of it before. "Songs are well enough in their time and place. I am waiting for the story, and growing weary of waiting."

"I have told thee the story. I wait now here for the pig Nawazish Ali and his three rupees. I am minded to have those three rupees, and afterward to see about that interest I mentioned. He said something about eighteen annas—or was it thirty-six? Truly I forget, and I know of a better interest. I am ready for him."

"I have met a many fools in my time," said Taj Mohammed reflectively, putting aside the pipe and getting ready to retire into the little shed between the horse stalls. "Many fools of many kinds, but none so great as thou! A sheik, safe back to his own land and among his friends, turned Hindu again, as like as not, and having forgotten the debt until he saw thee, will seek thee here in the dark before dawn, and pay thee what he owes? Amir Ali, didst thou ever ask a vulture to return a piece of flesh? And what said he?"

"That man was thoroughly afraid," said Amir Ali. "I await him here, and I have no doubt but that he comes."

"Then keep thy vigil alone," said Taj Mohammed, "and may the mists give thy bones something less visionary to think about. There are three hours yet till dawn, and sleep is good. Give praise to Allah! There is no God but God, and Mohammed is his prophet."

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"Allah il Allah!" assented the auditor.

Perhaps an hour later, or perhaps a little less, two men came into Mirza's yard and walked up to Amir Ali.

"Was there not one who spoke with thee?" they asked, and Amir Ali, nothing loath to have his friend awakened from slumber, told them where to find Taj Mohammed. They went in search of him and dragged him out presently, handcuffed. Amir Ali drew his knife and was knocked down promptly. Before he knew it he, too, was handcuffed, and four more men swooped on him from nowhere. Both he and Taj Mohammed were hustled through the gate to the street outside, where some one who was not Nawazish Ali peered into Amir Ali's face.

"Ha! Will free lodging answer for the three rupees?" he asked. "To the lockup!" he ordered. "Charge them with assault and with having weapons, and see that they keep silence for three days. Say to the sahib in the morning that there are leopards to be hunted, and he will understand."

So a jail door clanged on Amir Ali and his friend, and they had no opportunity to spread the information.

CHAPTER VIII

Brother, the dawn breaks gold and bright!
Gird up thy loins, then, brother mine!
See, how the road glints in the light,
Easy and open, brother mine!
O'er bog and swamp, on wile and wo,
Through blind ravine, on lurking foe,
Does no light shine? Do dangers go
Unlighted only, brother mine?
—*Yasmini's soug.*

MARTINEAU would probably have been too much impressed by the mental superiority of Professor Bourgowitch to have done much thinking on his own account, but as they dined together at the Club that evening a folded *chit*, addressed to him from the police office, gave him an excuse to leave the table momentarily. And the contents of the note, when he read it in the club anteroom, proved food for reflection:

> The one-eyed Afghan arrested this afternoon on a charge of assault with intent, who refused to give his name, made good his escape—it is suspected with connivance of the guard, who has been placed in confinement.

The note was initialed by one of Martineau's assistants, who knew nothing at all of the inner workings of police strategy and who had no ambition in the direction of the "Game." To him it had meant nothing more than more annoyance, and the prospect of one more irritating and futile official inquiry; to Martineau, however, it meant proof again of "something big" on foot, in which he ought to have a finger, if a hand in the "Game" was ever to be his.

His ultra-suspicious policeman's brain began working against time, recalling minor incidents and piecing them together in a pattern that left huge gaps, but none the less resembled something which might prove plausible, and even true, if followed up. Thus:

The Professor could read Persian, but denied it.

The Professor had insisted on visiting the stables of local horse traders, and had unaccountably changed his mind almost the moment that the opportunity of visiting them had been accorded him.

Not long after this sudden change of mind he had been in possession of a paper, bearing Persian characters.

It needed no trained policeman to suppose the possible connection between the Persian characters and the change of mind.

Stables — Persian messages — um-m-m! The prisoners locked up in the cells a little before dawn, and held without examination pending instructions from the "Political," had been arrested, he now remembered, in Mirza's stables.

One-eye, who had seemed to want to attack the Duke's secretary, had made good his escape "probably with connivance." Um-m-m! Getting nearer!

How about the tip the Professor tried to give? And its rejection? Might the "tip" not have been a note in Russian? Might that not have been cleverly palmed, and a note in Persian substituted? And—and—and—had the presence on the spot of the old Mohammedan not been singularly, even suspiciously, opportune?

And—and—and, getting nearer again!—for a gentleman who risked his life to save that of an utter stranger, had not the Mohammedan's indignation at the offer of a tip been somewhat hasty, even for India, where creeds and castes and pride commingle and wrath rises as the fish do, without reason or warning?

As he walked back to the dinner table,

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taking his time about it, he wondered why the Professor—who after all was private secretary to no less a personage than a Grand Duke, and was therefore something of a personage on his own account, if only by reflection—should have been handed over to himself.

He had no false notions about his position; he knew quite well that it was relatively insignificant. There were fifty men, at the very least, who were not only better suited by rank and seniority to entertain the Grand Duke's secretary, but who would have done it eagerly. He wondered why something of the kind had not occurred to him before. And he wondered a great deal about the Grand Duke's secretary, as he took his seat facing him again.

"Nothing very serious, I hope?" the Professor asked politely.

"Oh, no; nothing serious."

"Nothing, I hope, that will interfere with our evening's amusement?"

"Why—er—I think not," said Martineau.

("I wonder, now, what Yasmini has got to do with this?" he was thinking.)

"Was there not some nautch, or native dance or other, that you thought of taking me to see?"

"And why—how is it that the private secretary to a Grand Duke can so far forget his official dignity as to consent to being worked off on a mere policeman?" wondered Martineau. Aloud he answered:

"Why—I don't know; there are lots of things to choose from. What would you like to do?"

"I have never seen a nautch," said the Professor.

"And, like George Washington, you never told a lie!" thought Martineau.

"A nautch is usually rather commonplace," he said aloud.

The Professor showed a distinct trace of sub-anxiety—the merest, least suspicion of a tendency to crack where the veneer was laid on thinnest. Even a finished actor finds it hard to quite control his eyes.

"Yes, Yasmini's in this!" thought Martineau.

"Didn't you say something about one that wasn't commonplace?" asked the Professor. His manner was as polite as necessary, and his inflection guarded, but the half hypnotic eye-control maneuver was a shade too obvious.

"And she asked me whether I would tell her the inside secrets, if she helped me! I wonder whether it was she who wrote that message in Persian to the Professor? I heard her laugh after I was gone, and——"

"Wasn't there some woman who was once a Rajah's wife? A—ah—what d'you call it?—a Maharanee?" hinted the Professor.

"Why, yes, there was," said Martineau. "But are you sure you want to see a nautch?"

His brain was racing.

"Got it!" he swore to himself.

"I would rather see a good nautch, staged by a woman such as she must be, than anything on earth," said the Professor.

"I haven't a doubt of it!" thought Martineau. "So it's as easy as all that, eh? As simple as that!" He smiled at the Professor. He felt above him all at once—up in the clouds above him. He felt he almost knew how God looked down on scheming kings.

"You shall see one presently," he said, with condescension that was so obvious it made the Professor wince.

"So-ho!" thought Martineau. "So-ho! So Yasmini's using me, is she? And the Commissioner's using me, and the Professor's using me; and where do little I come in? Let's see——"

He was drumming with his fingers on the tablecloth, and he knew that the Professor thought that he was considering the evening's amusement.

"I can't help what the Commissioner does, and I daren't spoil the Commissioner's little game. And the Commissioner will look after the Professor. Remains Yasmini—and she's playing false; playing false to every one, I'm willing to bet a year's pay. Well——"

"What was the woman's name?" asked the Professor, with an air that Martineau could have seen through with his eyes shut.

"As though you didn't know!" thought Martineau. Then a good idea occurred to him.

"Zira," he answered.

"Zira? Surely, no! Was that it? Has she two names? No, I don't think it was Zira, Mr. Martineau?"

"Zira dances very nicely—dances divinely. Zira would amuse you more than anything. If I didn't say Zira, I must have meant Zira," said Martineau. "Certainly, Zira's is the place to go to."

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"Oh," commented Professor Bourgowitch.

"Yes," said Martineau. Then he produced his pocketbook and a pencil. "Will you excuse me if I write a note?"

IT WAS a short note, but he seemed to think it quite important; for instead of folding it he called for an envelope and sealed it with evident care. Then he excused himself, so that the Professor might not overhear the destination of the message. Outside on the veranda he found his servant squatting in a line with a string of others.

"Police office—quick! Bring an answer, but don't send the answer in. Send word in, and wait for me outside. Understand?"

The man was gone in a moment, and Martineau retraced his steps, still thinking against time.

"If Yasmini proposes to make use of me and leave me in the soup, she's laughing down the wrong sleeve," he vowed. "If Yasmini's in this, she's bound to fall foul of the Political, even if I don't forestall them—as I mean to, by the little brass gods of Burma!

"And as for the Political, the Secret Service—well, whoever would have thought the thing so simple? Why in——don't they use policemen, and do the thing cheaply and in half the time?

"Why? Why? Why? Oh, why does any one do anything in India? We're all mad, all the time; and the Professor's the biggest ass of all of us!"

He went back to the table and made instant, wise decision between tedious excuses and more drinks. A Russian, he remembered, has amazing notions as to what an Englishman prefers to drink, and drinks with him out of sheer politeness. He had just had half a magnum of champagne, for the first time since he came to India, and he thought he might as well live up to the thing.

"Two whisky pegs!" he ordered. "That'll make the Prof. as drunk as me, in any case," he consoled himself, cutting the end off a cigar.

"Just one drink together," he explained to the Professor, "and we'll start out on the real adventure of our lives!"

"Here's to you!" answered Bourgowitch, praying that his adversary might prove drunker than himself.

Ten minutes later Martineau's man came back with a little package, and once more the policeman left the room—this time to secrete a folding mirror on his person, and a few other things that a policeman sometimes carries with him to the consternation and confounding of his enemies.

"Can't trust her mirrors," he reflected. "There might not be one in sight this evening. So-ho! The Commissioner knows she's scheming with the Russians, eh? And she suspected Gulbaz, so they pretended to kill Gulbaz and put him on her trail.

"But she saw through that, and they don't know it. They're sicking me on to lead the Prof. into her net, where the S. S. is to get the credit of bagging the lot—eh? And where do little I come in, eh? Are they reckoning with little me?

"Or do I forestall the whole crowd, and win my spurs, and wipe the eye of Gulbaz? Do I, or do I not? . . . Come on, Professor. Come and see Yasmini!"

"Very good," said the Professor. "Certainly I come! Yes, yes—Yasmini was the name you said; not Zira."

And Martineau, with his private ambition almost within reach, wondered whether the Professor thought that acting.

There was a little more than mere elation at the prospect of pulling off a *coup* throbbing through Martineau's veins that night. There was the sinful pride (than which there is no pride dearer to untransformed humanity) of showing the Professor things which Governors of Provinces would not admit they knew about, and certainly would never go to see.

He considered, too, that he was learning lessons, and rather prided himself on the admission. He had long known that it is not necessary for a clever rogue to creep and crawl and hide himself; but he discovered now that, given the necessary nerve and certain introductions, he can use the very minions of the law as stalking-horses. There is no greater gall than that, and as such he admired it, while taking its corollary to heart.

"After tonight I'm a Secret Service man," he told himself, "and I'll need all the gall I can grow or imitate. After tonight they'll give me anything I want, to keep my mouth shut—won't put it just that way, but it'll come to the same thing.

"They'll never play the game so low as to expose the Duke, and they'll have to keep me quiet—or so they'll consider. Gad!

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By the top of Kanchanjanga! Won't Gulbaz tear his hair when he knows I've wiped his eye!"

"These nautches," said the Professor, speaking in his ear. "I have heard that except very rarely they are weariness itself. Is that so? The dances of a nation are of course the truest guide to a nation's character; we know what a Hindu's character is, when he has any at all, so how can his women dance but slothfully? Is she Hindu?"

"Trying to get a line on how much *I* know," thought Martineau. "I've often guessed and half believed—now I *know* that she's at least part Russian."

Aloud, he answered:

"Supposing that your ballet is what I've heard it is, Professor, Yasmini would be too good for it. She'd make the others look like dummies."

"So! ? !" said the Professor. And a Slav can put more varying expression into that one syllable than even a German can.

"Here we are," said Martineau, turning in at the unostentatious door, and studiously looking anywhere except at the Professor.

"Excuse me if I go ahead of you, but I'm known here and you're not."

He caught the Professor. As he started up the stairs he used his mirror.

"That proves two things," he muttered to himself, as he saw Yasmini coming to the stair head to welcome them. "She has a peephole that shows who comes in, otherwise a maid would have met us. And—and—and—how was it?

"Right hand held about so high. Three passes to the right, clench it—three passes to the left, clench it—three passes upward, clench it twice. Do that over and over—it's easy to remember. And—and—I couldn't swear to it in court, but I'll be—— if I wouldn't bet on it; that's the same signal that the one-eyed man was making—One-eye who escaped *with* connivance. Why—that proves a whole lot of things."

He had the mirror out again, snuggled in the hollow of his hand, as he reached the stair top, and he saw the Professor make the same signal again. He saw, too, that Yasmini's amazing eyes were afire with recognition—of the signal if not of the man; and with something else, which, unless he mistook the signs very much indeed, was expectation of reward.

He found time to wonder what kind of reward could be large enough and rich enough and sufficiently unusual to tempt Yasmini.

"Is this the lord sahib Bahadur?" she inquired, bowing very low indeed. Martineau was not certain, but he did not think that she made any return signal.

"You know better than that," smiled Martineau, watching both of them as a tiger eyes his kill. "This is the lord sahib Bahadur's chiefest servant."

She made a little *moue* at Martineau that at any other time would have made him grovel to her. Now, though, he was remorseless; in his own imagination he was Charlie Martineau of the Secret Service—Martineau who didn't care a—— for sentiment, but only played the GAME.

He was watching the Professor, noting what impression the surroundings and the atmosphere, and Yasmini herself, were making on him. He thought that the Professor seemed a lot too self-controlled—too thoroughly in hand.

"Bad acting! Rotten acting!" he considered it.

"You said that *he* would come, himself!" frowned Yasmini, leading the way toward the inner room, after many Eastern salutations to the bearded giant.

"Beauty welcoming the Beast!" thought Martineau.

He walked last of the three, watching keenly for the least resemblance to a signal, but detecting none. He was beginning to feel awfully contemptuous.

"If they're all like this one," he reflected, "then the Secret Service is an overrated business. This fellow's open as a book!"

Yasmini—all smiles and cunning curves and diffidence, though not so diffident to the Professor but that one realized how much more diffident she could have been to his Grand Ducal master—backed away and tripped in front of them on jeweled toes, her every gesture an Eastern invitation. She was not still for a second. The fascination of her movements might have been designed expressly to keep both men's eyes fixed on her, for such was its hypnotic effect.

Even Martineau—don't-care-a-blow-now Martineau of the soon-to-be Secret Service—followed like a dumb dove fascinated by a serpent. Her gauzy draperies were decked at little intervals with silver

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shiny things, restless as she was, that glittered as she moved and made her look singularly serpent-like and scaly—or so thought Martineau.

When he did take his eyes away, with a conscious jerk, he was all but staggered by a very different apparition. Aspirants for Secret Service honors do not show that they are disconcerted, and none of the twenty men who watched him could detect the least sign of surprise.

FORTY eyes, all brown, all steady, gazed at him from under twenty Northern turbans. At first there did not seem twenty, for they were well distributed; but as he swept each corner of the room with a quick, detail-noting, trained policeman's glance he saw that there were men in every corner and on nearly every cushioned divan. And every single man was from the North.

There was one man, near the middle of the room, whose back resembled that of Gulbaz—or so thought Martineau. He was a trifle more vivacious-seeming than the rest, and that, of course, was proof that he was not Gulbaz. He was arguing a little bit too loudly, with too many gestures and too much emphasis. There were other things, too, that made the resemblance nothing more than a mere coincidence of attitude—the beard, for instance.

It was dyed red—spade-shaped toward the lower end—and of the full length that a Mohammedan must wear. Gulbaz was a Hindu and wore no beard—could not have grown one in so short a time, would not have dared wear a false one, and would have acted better than to sit in anything resembling his own normal attitude.

No, this man was too much like Gulbaz to be Gulbaz in disguise. And besides, Gulbaz would never have looked startled. No, it certainly could not be Gulbaz. But he wondered what Gulbaz might be doing.

The other men were either listening to the whispered arguments of him with the Gulbaz shoulders, or else staring at Martineau and the Professor. Martineau, leaving the Professor to blunder foolish compliments in what he thought was Hindustani to Yasmini, took one step sidewise, to get a better look at the fellow with the red-dyed beard. But for the dye he seemed awfully like the old Mohammedan who had refused the Professor's tip, after intercepting his person so opportunely.

But, almost as if he had been aware of what was passing in Martineau's mind, Redbeard moved and was unrecognizable; and as if she, too, had divined the question, Yasmini interfered.

"He was to have come himself!" she grumbled. "Am I to dance for this pig, whose face is hidden in the fires of hell? Ugh! I have seen weeds on a garbage heap that looked more wholesome than his beard!"

" 'Please the man, control his master,' " quoted Martineau, sitting down by the Professor on the divan that she pointed out to him; and Yasmini smiled to him as if he and she were twin conspirators who understood each other's every thought.

But Martineau was not forgetting his remorselessness. He did not let her smile sink in. Smile or not, he was ready at that minute to sweep Yasmini into the discard of the Law—and jail, if the Law proved long enough.

"We Secret Servants have no other sweetheart than the Game!" He forgot who had said that, but the words ran through his head persistently.

"I will not dance!" said Yasmini, with all the sudden petulance of a neurotic—or is it temperamental?—dancer of the West. "Tonight I was to have danced to a Prince, and you have brought me this *quiludar* of *gunwars!* Ugh! Let him go back to the robber nest he came from!"

Martineau managed to suppress a giggle. He did not much care whether Yasmini chose to dance or not, for he knew in his own mind that she would bring her plan to its conclusion in some way or other.

All he had to do was watch; and he could afford the time to wonder what the Professor would have thought, had he known what a *gunwar* is. At present he was pretending to believe it was at least a title of respect.

"*Quiludar* means chieftain," he assured him in an audible aside.

"So I inferred," said the Professor.

"Does he wish to see me dance?" asked Yasmini, swaying in front of them—all supple movement and beginnings and irresolution. "Will he tell his Prince? Ask him."

But Martineau saw fit to be facetious.

"He will say that you expected the Prince, and had a committee of reception here awaiting him!" he laughed, glancing

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round the room. "Are these the *gunwars* of whom you name him chieftain?"

"They are fit hosts of a prince!" she flared. "Their sires were kings when thine were *bandar-log!* They came to see the Prince, because I told them that he would be here! And you bring me this abomination!"

She fortunately used a word that is not Hindustani, so the Professor missed its meaning. There is no worse word, even in Asia, where they give imagination rein, and ladies do not hesitate to make use of the choicest—of expressions as well as other things.

"Ask him!" She stamped. "Does he wish to see me dance?"

The Professor interrupted with a bow that was affirmative as words, and Yasmini clapped her hands. Instantly the music struck up. Just as instantly the talking ceased. And for one instant—and no more—he of the red beard and the arguments looked around in quick anticipation.

"Gulbaz! By the Big Bass Drum! By the Bull of Bashan and the Pax Britannica, that's Gulbaz, or I'll eat my parchment!"

Then Yasmini danced, and all eyes in the room were fixed on her; for she could dance and sing as no other woman ever did. The Professor's eyes nearly started from his head, and he gripped Martineau's thigh as a horse bites.

"Truth!" he said. "It was truth! She is better than the Ballet. In the Ballet there is none so good!"

Martineau suffered such excruciating pain that he had to seize the Professor's wrist and force his fingers apart. Yasmini saw him, stopped, pointed with a quivering finger, and laughed aloud.

"There—he has seen! Tell him to go bring his Prince!"

With that she swept out of the room.

"Yes, I will bring the Prince," said the Professor. "Yes, his Highness the Grand Duke will be pleased with this. I will go at once and bring him!"

"But he's sick!" said Martineau.

"She—she will be medicine! I will go at once and bring him!"

He was up already, and starting for the door, and all Martineau could do was follow him, almost at a run.

"You will understand, my young friend," said the Professor, as they reached the street, "it would not be in order for you to be with us, for the Duke is sick. He is officially sick, and he and I do this alone—incognito. But tell me—what then is a *gunwar?* She said *gunwar.*"

"A particularly objectionable type of Hill robber," said Martineau. "They are very ugly, and very savage, and they practically never wash. Here's the carriage—mind your step."

And to the driver:

"Home! Drive quickly. Home!"

CHAPTER IX

Brother, my jaws are loosed with fear!
Bind thy chin tight, brother mine!
Brother, the feet of men draw near!
Draw thy knife, then, brother mine!
Brother, the deeps are living—hard!
Was that a breath, tight-held in the dark?
Ah! cairns above the lone graves mark
The Northern mountains, Brother mine!
—Yasmini's song.

IN DELHI they still talk about that night of nights, and there is nothing easier than to run across some vein of conversation that might lead, if followed up, to the truth about it all. But then it might, too, lead directly otherwise; for there are many sorts of lies in India, and few without a purpose of some sort. At all events, there would be no sense in asking Gulbaz—and Yasmini would only laugh, and sing a song or two.

Martineau would be angry at the mention of it. As he suspected they would do when the last round in the game began, they gave him promotion of a kind, to keep his mouth shut, but not at all of the kind he would have asked for; and if you sought him out in the lonely *mofussil* post where he is drawing extra pay, but gaining little new experience, his answers to your questions would be vague and even impolite. He is trying very hard to prove—and perhaps succeeding—that he is a man of much discreetness, these days.

He made one great, one hideous mistake that night. Before Professor Bourgowitch could reach his Grand Ducal master, Martineau had left him—which in itself was insubordination, if not worse. He had been ordered to look after and protect the Russian, and instead he left the carriage half way toward home, and ran for the police office.

Under cover of the pitch-black night, he brought a cordon of police through devious

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byways and drew it around Yasmini's in such a way that not a rat, even, could have left or entered undetected. His police—and nearly all of them were nothing *but* policemen—behaved abominably; behaved, in fact, like native "constabeels.' They interfered very roughly with occasional gentry whom they discovered lurking in inconspicuous corners, and but for sudden presence of mind on the part of Martineau himself they would have challenged even the Grand Duke, who turned up not long before midnight on the arm of the Professor. Martineau was only just in time to order them away, and let the Grand Duke walk into the trap unquestioned.

The men who had been so roughly interfered with probably were not *all* interested parties. Some were very likely thieves, awaiting opportunity, and others may have been enamored swains, as they protested, seeking ways to reach their lady loves. Anything is possible in India.

But one man, at the least, reached Ebbert the Commissioner, and the latter appeared in hot haste, not fifteen minutes after the Grand Duke and Professor Bourgowitch had gone together up Yasmini's stairs. Martineau was not far from the foot of them, deliberating whether it was time, or not yet time, to draw the net.

"Mr. Martineau," said Ebbert, "may I ask what you are doing here with all these men?"

"Sir, I've found something out—I'm about to make a raid." He was almost chattering with rage at the interruption. Now, he argued, he would have to share the credit with another man.

"Oh, are you? The last time I saw you I left you in charge of Professor Bourgowitch. You were to have kept him constantly in sight. May I ask you why you didn't?"

"Sir, I——"

"That'll do, Mr. Martineau. Be good enough to take your men back to their quarters, will you!"

"All of them, sir?"

"All of them. And at once, if you please!"

"But——"

"Did you hear me say, 'At once,' Mr. Martineau?"

"Very good, sir." Martineau, too, could play the Anglo-Saxon game of being awfully polite when he was angry. "I'm going now. I only wish to say, sir, that I wipe my hands of all responsibility for any consequences."

"Have you finished wiping them, sir?"

"Yes, sir! The Grand Duke is upstairs there, and so is Professor Bourgowitch, and so is Yasmini, and Gulbaz. Yes, sir, Gulbaz—alive, not dead; and there are somewhere in the neighborhood of twenty Northerners—look like Pathans and Afridis and Afghans. One, I thought, was a Baluchi——"

"Are you feeling quite well, Mr. Martineau?"

"I don't understand you, sir."

"Quite so. The Grand Duke, Mr. Martineau, is indisposed, and in his bed in the quarters provided for him. Will you be good enough to take your men away, sir? And—ah—if you care to see a doctor, the P. M. O. is at the club still."

"Thank you, sir. I need no doctor."

"Then take your men!"

So, swearing to himself in one long stream of mixed expletive and abominable metaphor, Martineau tramped back to the police station, taking less care on his way back to keep concealed. He marched back in quarter column of forty men through the widest streets.

And at the office he discovered orders waiting for him—instant orders to go instantly to a distant out-station, and do nothing until receipt of further instructions. There was no time, said the written command, to attend to packing up. There was a train that went at one A.M. that must be caught, and the luggage would be sent on later.

The writer of the orders "had the honor, sir, to be" Mr. Martineau's "obedient, humble servant, L. G. Protheroe." And he was no less than the Provincial Superintendent of Police. The train, that means, was caught—and taken; and the luggage followed later on.

That was really all that Martineau ever did know about it all, except what he read about it in the papers. So what would be the use of asking him?

You would draw Ebbert blank, of course, for Commissioners do not achieve the rank until they have become adepts at keeping their own counsel. And the Grand Duke would naturally be quite out of the question. Even if another Grand Duke were to ask him questions he would not be likely to describe the details of what happened.

Nor is it any use looking for the printed page; because, for reasons that transpire, Professor Bourgowitch did not write that

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book after all, and the Grand Ducal publishers were what is known as "left." All official sources are quite closed; and one must look to the bazaar, and sift the truth from half a million lies, in order to trace the thread through to its conclusion.

Ojira—she was handmaid to Yasmini, and it was always she who met the uninvited and the unexpected at the stair head—gave a somewhat intimate account of it to Amir Ali, although not in Mirza's yard. He and his friend Taj Mohammed were quite unexpectedly released the morning after their imprisonment, on the ground that there was no substantial charge against them; and nobody who knows an Afghan will need much convincing that both Amir Ali and his friend set out forthwith to find out how they might get vengeance.

Both men were satisfied that Nawazish Ali was the expert who had whelmed them in indignity, and Yasmini's was the last known trysting-place of that benevolent gentleman. So they went to Yasmini's, and were entertained by Ojira.

OJIRA may have had some hope of being a Yasmini herself some day. It is difficult to believe that any woman, let alone Ojira, could have spent so many hours in such mysterious society without being hit hard by ambition. At all events, Ojira invited Amir Ali to attend a private salon of her own, which she kept at sporadic intervals.

There were some who said that Yasmini did not know about this other little salon, run by a maid who should have devoted all her time to her mistress's designs, and there were others who maintained that there was nothing Yasmini did not know in Delhi, and that therefore Ojira, in her semi-secret apartment over beyond the Chandni Chowk, was more dangerous than otherwise. All that can be sworn to is that Ojira did have a sort of imitation Yasmini's, and that she entertained Amir Ali and Taj Mohammed there.

It is not at all certain that Amir Ali reported correctly what she told him, nor that she told him the truth—for the one was a woman and the other an Afghan; but it is known what Amir Ali said she told him, for he told a dozen men in Mirza's yard, giving his desire to find Nawazish Ali as excuse for the story. As if any story needs excusing in the East!

"She said, my brothers—and I have a notion that the wench was so in love with me she could not bring herself to lie—" here he stroked his great beard, and looked upward at the night in utter self-deprecation that made all the others laugh— "she said—she was fanning me, as I remember—she said that the lord sahib Bahadur came, and he was drunk."

"'Oh, true believers, surely wine is an abomination of the work of Satan'," quoted somebody; "'therefore, avoid it that ye may prosper.'"

"Truly, truly," assented Amir Ali. "The lord sahib Bahadur was full of wine as a tick is full of blood, and he prospered not. Listen! It was on this wise, or so said Ojira; and she loved me, beseeching me to come again. Nay, brothers, but I think she did not lie.

"She said that he laughed often and without cause, as the sahibs all do when in drink, whether they be English sahibs or of other nations—leaning in a very drunken manner on the man who brought him, and whom she named the Yak, because of his unkempt whiskers, though I have since heard that his name is rightly Boo-aw-ishee.

"The Yak, she said, was he who gave the signs by which they knew truly that he came from beyond even our Northern mountains (although circuitously, by the *kali pani*). He made signs in the street, and so they knew that it was he who should bring the lord sahib Bahadur to them, to make promises and give them proofs.

"For they, my brothers, were none others than the spokesmen of the tribes beyond the border. Even *we* could name a few of them, if we gave thought to it—though naming names is work for fools and women."

"Aye, fools and women!" growled a chorus from the dark.

"Nawazish Ali—so *she* said, and I believe the wench—was at the bottom of it all. He it was who laid the train and set the match to it. He bore a paper, done in Russian, proving him the man who had the ear of Russia. He had but to present his paper to the lord sahib Bahadur's man—to the Yak, in fact—when he would be accepted as negotiator."

"Negotiator in what matters?"

"Aye, in what? Speak on!"

"They be always negotiating beyond the Northern mountains—but who heard aught come of it?"

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"Or who heard of aught that ever came south out of Turkestan, my brother? So negotiations come to naught, eh? Remember Turkestan!"

"Tell thy tale, Amir Ali; the night grows forward, not backward. None can call back a minute that is gone!"

"Negotiator in certain matters pertaining to a rising, all together——"

"Oh!"

"Ah! Aye! Oh-ah! Listen, brothers!"

"A rising all together, and a raid, with help by way of arms and cartridges from Russia; and much payment to be made in silver, and guarantees of freedom for all time; and having reference—or so *she* said—to many other things."

"Well? And what had Yasmini to do with it?"

"She? Oh, it was at her house they met. But wait. There are other matters to be mentioned first. The beginning of it all was on our side of the border. So, then: Nawazish Ali, schemer of uncertain schemes, ate out of Russia's hand.

"He was, as *we* all know, a sheik; one time an unbeliever. None quite believed him when he said that he bore word from Russia. None would agree to rise at word from him. All asked a proof, and all asked word with some lord sahib of the Russians, and a writing, and some proofs of friendship in advance."

"Aye!"

"Aye!"

"Aye!"

"We of the North are not such fools as some. Proofs in advance, say we!"

"Aye! Who would believe Nawazish Ali?"

"Well, my brothers, this Nawazish Ali said—or so *she* told me—'I will give a sign,' said he, 'and I will give ye word with a lord sahib out of Russia' (though this was after many months of argument, and after they had pulled his beard and laughed in his ugly face). He told the leaders of the tribes to come to Delhi, where in due time and at his own convenience he would show them a true lord sahib out of Russia, who by his own lips would make them promises. And they quoted him the Koran, which bids men refrain from boasting."

"Aye! Aye! 'Walk not proudly in the land, for thou canst not cleave the earth,' says the Holy Book!"

"But he, my brothers, mocked them, saying, 'Ye be cowards, and ye dare not come.' "

"Why did they not slay him?"

"Because—or so *she* said—they were thinking always of the presents that he told them *would be* had. And finally they came, each by his own route and in his own good time. And *he* came, as *we* know, down the Khaibar. Then came the lord sahib Bahadur, too, to Delhi, pretending to be very sick; staying all day within the house, but sending out the Yak to make his signals, and growing very drunk by evening.

"And when night came the Yak took him, being very drunk, and brought him to Yasmini's, showing him to all. And she—Yasmini—danced—as only she can dance (for I have seen her, and I know. All other women are as cows in calf compared with her). And the lord sahib Bahadur, being full of wine——"

" 'Wine is an abomination, the work of Satan,' says the Holy Book!"

"Aye. God is great, my brothers."

"*Allah il akbar!* Say on, Amir Ali!"

"—Being full of wine, and foolish, swore that he would carry her away to Russia, there to dance to a certain emperor he named."

"WHAT emperor would that be?"

"Nay, I know not. Yasmini laughed at him, saying: 'Show us a proof, lord sahib Bahadur. Show us a little more than empty talk. We be hungry folk—we from beyond the border; and who riseth on an empty belly?'

"So spake Yasmini, being the first to speak in any except hidden phrases. Nay, she fears nothing, and no man! And the lord sahib, being urged thereto by the Yak, subsided into silence, looking dark and letting the Yak make promises.

"He made many promises, and they asked him many questions. And when they asked him ten times over had he authority to speak, he pointed to the drunken lord sahib at his side, and the lord sahib nodded—doing all things, and agreeing always, as he said. So Yasmini took up the argument again, and it was she who brought things to a head."

"Aye, it is always a woman who does that, my brothers!"

"Silence! Let Amir Ali tell his tale!"

"She laughed and said, 'Let there, then, be a compact, written here, and signed, and

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given into safe keeping, that all men may see it and all may know what promises are made, and who has made them, and to whom, and what the conditions be.' And the others nodded, seeing that she spoke wisdom.

"The Yak made many arguments against it, but the lord sahib, being drunk, and anxious to see more dancing, hurried him and urged him, until in the end a contract was drawn up, and signed, and all men present put their seals to it—the lord sahib writing with a pen, and sealing also with the ring from his little finger (though this was much against the Yak's advice, he being no doubt anxious for a loophole for escape from all the promises).

"Then Yasmini laughed again, and danced a little. Then she said, 'What man shall keep the compact?'

"And they all began to quarrel, all speaking at once and each man claiming leadership; until Yasmini, laughing as always, seized the written compact and threw it to Nawazish Ali, saying, 'Keep thou it—show it, thou, to other men beyond the border!'"

"And she had hardly spoken it, and Nawazish Ali had but then concealed it in his coat, when from below stairs there came a call of: 'They come! The soldiers come! The police come! There is a raid! Make haste and hide!'

"Ojira told me that in a moment there was nothing there to see except the lord sahib and the Yak, both looking very foolish and most helpless; both standing, and hastening to straighten down their clothes—and Yasmini imploring them to leave her house.

" 'For what will the English think of me?' she said—or so says Ojira. And they said many things uncomplimentary to the English, but—or so *she* says—they left."

"Leaving behind them the agreement?"

"Leaving behind them the agreement! Aye! So says Ojira."

"Then are the Russians bound to stand behind the rising! Then we should hurry back, my brothers!"

"Wait!" said Amir Ali. "Wait! There is other matter yet. Where is the lord sahib? Where is the Yak?"

"It was given out that the lord sahib Bahadur had been taken very seriously ill, and that the *dakitars* had told him to go home again if he would live. And it was told that plague had broken out at Amritzar, and traveling was not considered safe. For those reasons went the lord sahib."

"And does any man believe these reasons?" wondered Amir Ali. "Was the lord sahib not said to be sick when he went that night to Yasmini's? And if Nawazish Ali had the compact, where can it be now?"

"Find Nawazish Ali, and ask him!"

"Nay, for he is dead," rejoined Amir Ali.

"Dead? How so? Who said so? Hast thou seen him dead?"

"Nay, but I have seen his grave, and I have seen his clothing, and his knife, and certain other things he had. A man by the name of Gulbaz came to me yesterday—a Hindu; and he asked me, 'Seekest thou Nawazish Ali?' And I told him no, not being minded to converse with strangers.

"So he bade me go with him, that I might see Nawazish Ali's knife and clothing and be able to tell other men the truth about Nawazish Ali. And I went. And beyond all doubt is Nawazish Ali dead."

"Aye. Maybe. But perhaps he had given first his compact to another man. Perhaps it is already on its way to the border."

"Aye—perhaps!" said Amir Ali. "Have any of you visited the jail? Know any of ye who are in the inner cells? Then listen, for I know. Of the eighteen men who Ojira told me were at Yasmini's that night, there is not one at liberty. They lie, each man of them, within stone walls, behind iron bars, and under double guard!"

"Hey!"

"Oh!"

"Ah! Oh!"

"And the compact? What has happened to the compact?"

"Ask the English, for perhaps they know!" suggested Amir Ali.

Now what Amir Ali told the others in the night in Mirza's yard may, and again may not, be true. He got his story from a woman, and she no doubt had an object when she told him. But the facts as the wide world knew them were sufficiently in keeping with his tale to lend some verisemblance to it.

The Duke was stated to be very sick, and that no later than the morning following his visit incognito to Yasmini's. He himself issued a quite pathetic statement to the public, in which he expressed his infinite regret that his sudden indisposition should be so severe as to compel him to leave India.

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He was carried on board the waiting steamer at Bombay, but was seen to be enjoying a cigar before the ship weighed anchor. But he said that he was sick; and it is considered best to take what Grand Dukes say as Gospel.

As for the jail—— Gradually, one by one, it spewed out eighteen turbaned prisoners, who had answered, each, so many questions and had listened to so much parental talk, that they felt disagreeably disposed for further conversation this side of their border. They must have said things over the border, though, for in all history there has been only one period of five years during which there was no rising, and those were the five fat years that followed the visit to India of the Grand Duke Peter.

Possibly owing to a compact, hidden somewhere, that might possibly have borne a ducal signature and might possibly have brought a Grand Duke to disgrace, the Russian Government treated England very gently until the Grand Duke Peter died.

And Gulbaz? Follow Gulbaz, and be still.

CHAPTER X

Now, Rule Number One is, "Keep after the ball";
Rule Two is, "Ride straight, and don't think of a fall";
Rules Three-to-the-end are the same.
If you'd play, then adopt as your motto, my friend,
That the first and the last, the beginning and end,
And the whole in between is the GAME.
—*Rules for any game at all.*

EBBERT, the Commissioner, was not a man who troubled about souls and their origin or destination. In fact, he might be called an eminently practical official, given less to study of the theory of life than to the energetic practise of the utmost that he knew. Yet India had hold of him in certain ways, as she does get hold of any man who serves her, whether he rejects her gods or worships them.

Ebbert would hardly have admitted it, even to his closest friend; but away out in what the natives know as Indraprashta (and that is the ancient name of oldest Delhi) there was an utterly deserted shrine that meant more to him than his club.

The shadow of the Kulb Minar falls over it, although from the little shrine itself that most perfect of all towers is invisible, so tangled and impenetrable is the maze of jungle growth and ruins all around. Only a goat track leads to it—or perhaps it is a jackal track; and it winds in and out amid deserted, ruined streets that once reëchoed to the songs and tumult of an empire, but give back now nothing more than jackal howls to the forgetful sky.

Where once was war—where followed war's waste and devastation—there is now peace, of a kind. Men have forgotten even the god's name to whom the shrine was once erected; but there Ebbert always could acquire more peace, and get, as he thought, nearer to the heart of things, than in any other place on earth.

After long, tide-under spells of concentrated work that are the lot of every Anglo-Indian official, he would take his pony out along the road that leads tourists to the Kulb Minar; leave the pony with a peasant at the crossroads, where a maze of foot trails intertwine and join up with the pony road; and walk on foot, chancing the cobras and other things that love the solitudes, to where his little shrine nestled, still uncrumbled, in the heart of all the wilderness.

It surely was his shrine, for he had found it, and he visited it. Several times he had made a test, to determine whether it was his alone, leaving twigs and grass in such a way that any one arriving must disturb them; had the shrine possessed another visitor, he would have bought him out, or possibly have ordered him away, or, failing that, would have given up his visits altogether.

It was because it was his own, and no man else's, that it meant so much to him. It was his Peace—the abiding-place of all the peace he had. He used to leave flowers there, gathering them as he came along, and smiling to see the last visit's bunch untouched still, lying withered underneath the little fluted arch.

The Grand Duke having taken his departure—to the scrunch of marching infantry and the distant thunder of saluting guns—the tension of the tight-held strings of policy being loosed a little for the moment, and a letter of acknowledgment and praise having reached him and been placed on record, Ebbert flung the reins away for one quite illegitimate and unrecorded holiday. For it was part and parcel of these interludes of peace that they must be taken utterly without official knowledge; he

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would disappear, and his subordinates might choose their own excuse for him. All they knew about it was that he returned each time with added calm and added energy.

He found his trail untrodden, for it was *his* trail, too; the twigs that he had laid across it, so cunningly that a jackal would have jumped them but a man would have crashed through, were all in place; and the silence that he loved so much was there to swallow him and soothe him back again into something very much like love for his mistress India, who works a man so hard and takes such toll from him, but gives so little in return. He felt the kind peace creeping over him as he drew nearer, and the first sight of the little lonely shrine aglow against the shadows in the fading evening light was sweeter than the sight of home had ever been—for it meant more. Home had meant hope of things ahead. The shrine stood for reflection and review.

His step quickened as he neared the trail's end, watching always for the least sign of disturbance of his marks, and taking no notice at all of the rustling retreat of snakes. He was back in memory of other visits; he could feel again the moon-bathed silence, and the sense of rest. He had always watched the sunset, squatting in between the pillars of the little arch, and he hurried to be in time again. But suddenly he jumped, as a startled black buck jumps.

"*Salaam, Ebbert Sahib*"

His marks were all in place, but there was a stranger sitting underneath the arch. And the stranger continued—

"Greeting, brother!"

"Gulbaz!"

"Why not Gulbaz, sahib? Are you and I so unlike in all things? I said, 'Salaam'; then I said, 'Greeting, brother!' "

"Why did you come here, of all places?"

"This is my place, sahib—I am the spirit of the place!"

"*Your* place?"

The old Hindu chuckled, with a sound like water flowing from a hidden spring. He looked more like a Chinaman than a Hindu; cross-legged, like an image of the Chinese Buddha.

"How did you get here without disturbing any of my marks?"

"I never did disturb them, sahib; yet I come here oftener than you."

"Greeting, brother," said Ebbert, a little tardily, but remembering his manners in the teeth of disappointment.

"I have never grudged you your visits to my shrine," said Gulbaz. "Is there not peace enough for both of us? I have been glad to see the flowers, and have prayed often that you might win understanding. Welcome, brother; but the shrine is mine!"

Ebbert drew nearer, and the ivory image of a man made room for him between the pillars, chuckling as Ebbert pulled his shoes off before treading on the sacred stone.

"So, sahib! That is why I named thee brother! Thus, and only thus, may men win understanding—by giving first respect to what they do not understand. Welcome at the threshold, brother!"

Ebbert sat beside him in silence for the best part of an hour.

"I thought I was the only man who came here—the only man who knew about this place," he said then. Even after an hour of it, he found it hard to jettison resentment. Besides, Gulbaz was a native and his own subordinate, and outward forms of dignity die hard.

"My brother, sahib, thought he was the only man who knew the Bear's trail. He was wrong. Had he been wise, he would have shared what he knew with me; but he was selfish."

"Um-m-m! That's the first I ever heard about your brother."

"Nay, sahib. You have heard about him often. I came here now for no other purpose than to offer up a few prayers for my brother."

"Do you mean your blood brother?"

"My twin brother, sahib."

"I'm sure I never heard of him."

"Yet he did a service to the *Raj*—not willingly, but none the less a service greater than most men perform. He died in the service of the *Raj*—that, too, unwillingly. But not one whit the less did he perform a service."

"What was his name?"

"Nawazish Ali."

"WHAT? He was your brother?"

"My twin brother, sahib."

"And you killed him?"

"Nay. Far be it from me! My brother had a taste—a greed it might be called—for mushrooms of a certain sort. And there be many sorts of mushrooms, much alike."

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"But—er—you must have—er—provided him with—er—with the poisonous fungi?"

"Nay, sahib. There was once a time when I had need to see to details. There was once a time when he who planned the Kulb Minar laid bricks, or carried them for him who did. That day is past. I have servants of my own, and there is Yasmini. He ate at Yasmini's."

"Ah! Yasmini! I had hardly given her a thought."

"She lacked none, sahib! There is more thought in her least movement than in the whole long-drawn-out lives of many men."

"I mean I had not thought about her since she played her part."

"Since when did she cease playing, sahib?"

"Um-m-m! You mean, I suppose, that she's always active—always up to mischief?"

"Always. There is no other woman in the world like Yasmini."

"I've wondered once or twice whether she is to be trusted. Does she play the game, with a small g, or the Game with a big one—which?"

"Which is the biggest, sahib? Thou, I, she, we, all together—or the Game?"

"The Game, of course; but——"

"Truly the Game, sahib, and we are all its servants—thou, and I, and she, and all the others! The Game has swallowed her alive, as it took my brother dead. She can not draw back, and she knows it, and she dare not try. Even she—even Yasmini, and there is no other woman like her in the world—knows it, and dare not try!"

"Well, if she did make up that mind of hers to try, it would be a——bad day for——"

"For her, for Yasmini."

"I've a notion she could do a heap of damage before the Game could throttle her."

"Listen, sahib. What happened? How many men have tasted jail? And are they men whose breath smells of forgiveness? Is it likely that in case one word were said of least suggestion, those eighteen men, or their eight-and-twenty sons, or their brothers, would desist from trailing Yasmini before her life had gone out at the bidding of a knife?

"Think you those lips that lied so glibly to the Hillmen would be left to lie again? Or think you that perhaps some Northerner might be found with courage enough, and brains, and the desire to slit off those lips and hang them to her door knob? Think you Yasmini does not know that?

"Aye, she knows it. She weighed well the chances when she first sought leave to take a hand in the Game, and she knows now that the Game protects her, as it protects me and others—and did not protect my brother.

"Once, sahib, my brother played the Game. Playing the Game, he learned things, and later he forgot the Game. But the Game does not forget, any more than we, its servants, can forget. And the Game uses all men who have ever dipped one finger in its maze knowingly. Yasmini knows that.

"She would be used, even as my brother was used, right up to the end; and she would die, even as my brother died, for the Game, because the Game ordered it, and to serve the Game's good purpose."

"I'm sorry about your brother, Gulbaz. I did not know that the man they called Nawazish Ali was your brother. I am very sorry. It would have been so easy to have had him arrested and brought to trial. That would have saved you the necessity."

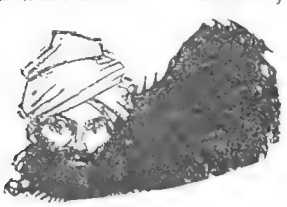
"And had he been brought to trial, sahib? What then?"

"He'd have been hanged as surely—as surely as the sun is setting over yonder."

"The mushrooms tasted very good, sahib! Come again, sahib; come often! This is my place, but it is at your service. Come again, and I will go when I see you coming; you will never know that I have been here.

"Salaam, sahib; beware of the cobras! Aye, I stay here a while. I stay to think about my brother.

"Salaam, sahib. Come again!"



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COME-ON CHARLEY

by THOMAS ADDISON

IF YOU stood on the top of the tallest building in New York and could throw a biscuit twenty and some-odd miles to a certain point between due north by west and due west by north it would land in a quiet and conservative little city which, for the purposes of this story, shall be called Hamilton.

And if the worthy Hamiltonians could know how and whence the biscuit came it would not astonish them half as much as the news that was brought one Thursday morning not long ago by a stranger who dropped in on them from New York, though not *via* the aerial route. He came prosaically by the eleven-o'clock express.

This person drove up to the Bennett House in a depot hack. He was middle-aged and portly, with a jolly face and humorous eye, and the effluence of prosperity hung about him like an aura. Life may not have been altogether a joke to this gentleman, but evidently it was not a sheer calamity; there was a lot of fun to be extracted from it if you knew how. His stay in Hamilton was to be short, it appeared, for he was bothered with none of the impedimenta of travel; he simply stepped out of the hack, poked a coin at the driver, and strode into the hotel.

Business was slack with the Bennett—a chronic ailment of long standing—and Mr. Teeters, the clerk, was not behind the desk. He was lolling in a chair in the lobby near the door, discussing things theatrical with a flabby-looking fat man who seemed consumed with *ennui*, or some other disagreeable feeling. This was Mr. Ellery Maginnis, sole proprietor of the Soulful Singing Blondes, and just now feverishly anxious to share the distinction with some one else—some one, say, of opulence and optimism, and an unspoiled faith in his brother man.

He—Mr. Maginnis—and the Blondes had come on by early train from Buxton, where they had played the night before. They were glad to get away from a town that had appreciated them only to the extent of thirty-four dollars and fifty cents, gross. Here in Hamilton they hoped for better recognition; but it was all a gamble, as Mr. Maginnis well knew, and beneath a carefully manufactured calm he concealed

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a troubled heart. The time ahead was doubtful, salaries were behind, and printing-bills unpaid—he was skating on some very thin financial ice, and could hear it cracking all around him.

As the portly stranger came in from the street Mr. Maginnis cast an idle eye at him, little guessing that he was the bearer of glad tidings, and Mr. Teeters glanced at him with lazy indifference that he did not dream was shortly to be changed to strenuous surprise. The stranger paused and took a survey of the lobby. One of the Blondes—Mrs. Maginnis herself—was busy with her pen at a long and much bespattered writing-table in the corner. With this exception, and of course not counting Mr. Teeters and Mr. Maginnis, the place was apparently deserted, though the click of billiard balls coming through a door at the rear announced the near-by presence of other humans.

"Who is in charge here?" inquired the newcomer crisply.

"I'm sort of looking after things," languidly answered Mr. Teeters. "I'm the clerk." He caressed a mournfully drooping auburn mustache and waited.

"My name is Drew," said the other. "I wish to find a Mr. Charles Arthur Carter. Can you tell me where he is likely to be at this hour?"

The clerk evinced immediate concern. He uncrossed his long legs and lifted himself from the base of his spinal column to an upright position in his chair.

"Come-On Charley? You say you're looking for him?" he queried, frowning.

Mr. Drew smiled.

"Why—yes," he responded. "If Mr. Carter answers to that name I am certainly looking for him."

Mr. Teeters pondered this a moment. Mr. Carter, as it happened, was playing pool in the room in the rear. His employer, Mack the shoedealer, was happily engaged in burying his mother-in-law that morning, and had closed his store until noon.

"Charley is a friend of mine," stated Mr. Teeters at length. "Anything wrong?"

"No."

"No trouble, hey?"

A curious light twinkled in Mr. Drew's eyes.

"Why, as to that, Mr.——"

"Teeters—Percival Teeters."

"Mr. Percival Teeters, as to that, there might be a difference of opinion. But I don't think you would call it trouble—I am quite sure you would not. Perhaps, as Mr. Carter is a friend of yours, you won't mind giving me some information about his family?"

"He hasn't got any," said Mr. Teeters shortly. "All dead. Look here, you ain't trying to hang anything on Come-On, are you?"

"Most assuredly not," disclaimed the stranger.

"Because," explained Mr. Teeters, "Come-On is a good boy. He's the best boxer in town, and strong as a goat. But he's Easy James all right. He's held the bag till he's got warts on his hooks as big as waffles. What's doing?"

Mr. Maginnis, who had followed the conversation with but feeble interest, here interjected a humorous remark.

"Perhaps," he suggested, "the gent has come to tell this Come-On Charley chap he's had a fortune left him."

"Hey?" exclaimed Mr. Teeters, startled. Then he gave out a crackling noise, which was accepted as laughter by those who knew him.

Mr. Drew contemplated the two with secret pleasure, and the spirit of mischief stirred in him.

"The gentleman has guessed my mission," he said composedly. "Where can I find—er—Mr. Come-On Carter?"

The theatrical manager whistled to himself, and Mr. Teeters's laughter strangled in his throat. He rose jerkily to his feet, like an ill made automaton, and his mustache wiggled in a way it had when Mr. Teeters was greatly moved.

"How much is it?" he squeaked.

"How much?" Mr. Drew hesitated a bare second. "Two million dollars."

MR. TEETERS reeled, and then Mr. Maginnis stiffened perceptibly where he sat. When the shock had passed, Mr. Teeters gave vent to an ejaculation peculiarly his own—

"Merry Moses!"

He choked and goggled dumbly at the bearer of this stupefying news. Mr. Maginnis got up and crossed softly to the opposite corner where his wife, better known to the world as Miss Pearl La France, was staring at him. The two at once became immersed in low-voiced confidences.

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Mr. Drew touched the clerk on the shoulder to arouse him from his trance.

"My good fellow," he remonstrated mildly, "my time is limited. If you will kindly tell me where I can find——"

"Hold on!" exploded Mr. Teeters. "I got him right here. Wait!" He hurried to the door of the billiard room and plunged through it. Presently he came back with a young man of about twenty-three or four. "Here's your millionaire," he proclaimed unctuously. "Best friend I got." This last with a canny thought to the future.

Come-On Charley solemnly and silently regarded his visitor. Mr. Drew returned the gaze with interest. He saw a compactly built, muscular young fellow of medium height, and with a broad and not ill favored countenance. The eyes were hazel and serious-looking, with long, dark lashes. The nose was straight, though a trifle flat, and the mouth wide and full-lipped. It was a face expressive of profound good nature, and the other man felt a twinge of compunction for his misstatement to Mr. Teeters. He had multiplied Charley's legacy two hundredfold to give himself a moment's pleasantry, and now he would have to dash hopes risen high. It could be done with a word, however, and no bones broken; so he went up to the boy and held out his hand.

"Mr. Carter, I am Samuel Drew, an attorney," he introduced himself. "I presume your friend has told you of your good fortune?"

"Yes," said Charley simply. "Kinder sudden, ain't it?"

Mr. Drew recovered his hand with a grimace, and privily spread the fingers apart to assure himself of their entirety.

"Just one question, Mr. Carter," he stipulated. "Have you any idea who would be apt to leave you money?"

"You can search me," invited Mr. Carter calmly.

"Didn't you have an uncle who went away——"

"Sure!" said Charley. "Uncle Bill Halstead, mother's brother. Licked dad and jumped the town. Family row. I slipped him a silver dollar when he left—all I had. Gee! That was twelve years ago!"

Mr. Drew gave a little grunt of satisfaction.

"It's all right," he declared. "Mr. Halstead's will is written around that silver dollar. He never forgot it. He went to China and did something in opium, and when he died, two months since, he left you all he had."

"Good old sport!" commented Charley staidly. And with this brief epitaph he laid his uncle's memory to rest.

Right here was where Mr. Drew should have said the word that would have straightened matters; but his curiosity got the better of him. He wanted to see how this stolid youth would play the rôle of millionaire. He turned to the hotel clerk and said:

"If you will show us to a room I shall be obliged. Mr. Carter and I have business to transact."

Charley glanced at a clock on the wall.

"I'll have to get back to work," he remarked. "I'm clerking at Mack's shoe store. Only had the morning off. Funeral."

The lawyer scanned him gravely, though certain undulations in the region of his lower vest buttons might have been noticed by an observant eye. It was the gentleman's way of making merry strictly within his corporal limits.

"I imagine you needn't worry about that," he said. "And Mr. Teeters, you might send in two pints of champagne and a few of your best cigars."

Mr. Teeters looked keenly at the speaker and then at Charley. Then he went thoughtfully over to the desk and pounded on a bell. A frowsy boy appeared from somewhere.

"Here, Tim," ordered the clerk, "show this gentleman to Parlor B, and do a dog trot. Just a moment, Come-On."

He fastened himself to Charley's arm, and Mr. Drew, smiling oddly, suffered Tim to lead him from the scene. Mr. Maginnis came over from his corner on the instant. He brought Mrs. Maginnis with him and introduced her to Charley with impressive ceremony. The lady's coloring did not permit of heightening with the pleasure she wished to exhibit, but she simpered, and ogled the newly gilded youth in a quite bewildering way.

"Such splendid news you've had!" she murmured.

"Kinder sudden, ain't it?" returned Charley dispassionately.

"Come-On, I'm going to 'phone Buck Tompkins," broke in Mr. Teeters. "You

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wait here." He disappeared behind the desk. Mr. Tompkins was the reporter for the Hamilton *Evening Star*. He was a young gentleman in whom Mr. Teeters reposed considerable confidence.

Mr. Maginnis seized on the momentary absence of the clerk to indulge in a little effusive personal demonstration. He took both of Charley's hands in his own and worked them up and down as if he would pump some of the unearned increment out of him—as, in truth, he was fully minded to do.

"My dear sir," he cried, "I want you to meet the ladies of my company. Charmin' girls! Bright as buttons an' lots of ginger. Come from the best fam'lies in the land. Refined, you know. An' sing! Say, they're canaries!"

Little warm points showed in Charley's eyes. He was fond of music. Mr. Maginnis, whose morals were perhaps a trifle cloudy, but whose perceptions were perfectly clear, hastened to press his advantage.

"This afternoon at four in thirty-two—my wife's room," he whispered. "There's a piano in it. Just us an' the girls—no more. We'll keep it quiet, eh?"

"Sure," said Charley. "Not for publication."

He winked frankly at Mrs. Maginnis, who playfully struck at him and told him to behave himself when her husband was around. With this sally, and as Mr. Teeters was coming from behind the desk, the devoted couple took themselves off up the public stairs.

II

"BUCK ain't in, but I left word for him," said Mr. Teeters when he rejoined his friend. "Look here, Come-On, suppose that gink we got in Parlor B is stringing you?" He frowned darkly at the thought.

"By George!" exclaimed Charley.

"We ain't seen the color of that two million," insisted Mr. Teeters gloomily. "Not a flash of it. And here he's ordering wine!"

"Good old sport," suggested Charley.

Mr. Teeters wiggled his mustache, and his frown grew blacker.

"Huh!" he sneered. "Maybe he is and maybe he ain't. Maybe he's going to sting you for the bill."

"By George!" exclaimed Charley again, though with a startled note. He was impartially ready to give ear to ill as well as good report.

Tim the bell boy reappearing, Mr. Teeters placed him in charge of the office and, turning to Charley, grabbed him by the arm.

"Come along!" he yapped. "We'll find out a thing or two."

He marched down a corridor to Parlor B, and without the preliminary of a knock burst into the room. Mr. Drew was seated by a table at the window with several papers spread out before him. As they came in he swept up the papers with an impulsive gesture and restored them to his pocket—all except one, a check, which he left in plain sight.

"Hello, what's up?" he inquired. Then, reading Mr. Teeters's mobile countenance as he would a display ad in a penny paper, he pointed an accusing finger at him. "Don't believe the news, eh, Mr. Merciful Skeeters?"

A slow grin gave employment to Charley's features. The mere sight of the lawyer had renewed his confidence in him.

"Merciful Skeeters!" he repeated. "Good. Bully."

The hotel clerk paid no attention to this, but addressed himself to Mr. Drew.

"My name is Teeters—not Skeeters," he remonstrated, though mildly; for his suspicions also were melting away in the presence of this assured person.

"I beg your pardon," craved the lawyer. "Mr. Teeters, of course. Will you be good enough, both of you, to step over this way? Take chairs, please."

When they were seated Mr. Drew reached down into his pocket and brought forth a ten-dollar gold piece. He laid this on the table before Mr. Teeters.

"While I think of it," he said, "will you kindly attend to the wine check when you go out? Give the change to charity—the Home for the Willfully Blind, say." His vest buttons joggled a little.

Mr. Teeters breathed hard and removed the coin from sight. Mr. Drew appeared to be taking counsel with himself. Presently he spoke:

"Two million dollars is an awful lot of money. If it was all in silver dollars it would nearly fill this room. If you could count sixty of them to the minute—which

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you couldn't do and keep it up—it would require over sixty-nine working-days, of eight hours each, in which to finish the job. Some cash that, eh, Mr. Skee—Teeters?"

Mr. Teeters wiggled his mustache, but made no reply. He was overwhelmed by the picture Mr. Drew had called up to him. Charley sat looking on as if he were a stranger who had no vital interest in the proceedings.

"That," continued Mr. Drew musingly, "is a force behind a man that translates him into a mighty power. The common knowledge that he is seized of so much money makes him irresistible. He doesn't have to show it to get what he wants; he doesn't really have to use it; the mere repute for great wealth unlocks all doors before him.

"And to the man himself—if he's the right sort—the sense of possession is dynamic; it gives him an impetus and assurance that carries him headlong to success. What do you say, Mr. Carter? Am I speaking by the card?"

"Sure," said Charley seriously.

"Good!" approved the lawyer. "Now I will ask your incredulous friend to inspect this cashier's check. It is for ten thousand dollars, payable to yourself. It—it's just a starter for you, so to speak—er—pocket money, as it were."

"Pocket money—ten thousand bucks? Merry Moses!" twittered Mr. Teeters weakly.

Charley waved his hand nonchalantly at the check.

"There you are, Percy. All shipshape. No strings."

Mr. Drew turned his gaze on the shoe clerk, who probably had never in his life owned a hundred dollars at any one time. This sudden possession of a goodly sum, and the prospect of great wealth to follow, appeared to affect him no more than if a string of cockle shells had been handed to him. It was all in the day's happenings, to be accepted as you would the rising of the sun or the falling of the rain. The lawyer wondered what short of dynamite would upset an equilibrium so magnificent, and it resolved him definitely on the droll experiment he was meditating.

"I don't suppose," he observed casually, "it is necessary to read Mr. Halstead's will. The fact that he left you all his property is sufficient, eh, Mr. Carter?"

"Sure," acquiesced Mr. Carter promptly. "Bore to read it."

"There is one thing, though, I must acquaint you with," went on the attorney, "and this is strictly between us three. You are not to be placed in possession of the two million right away. The fact is—er—you are expected to turn a trick or two with that ten thousand first. In other words, you are to make it grow a bit—add a little to it to see if you can be entrusted with the—er—principal. The two million are back of you, remember—the dynamic sense of possession; but—er——Well, you get me, don't you, Mr. Carter?"

Charley looked straight into his questioner's eyes—soberly and steadily.

"I get you," he answered, and looked away.

Mr. Teeters had pulled himself together and now got up on his feet.

"Come-On," he said earnestly, "they'll horn you out of your bundle sure if you run around loose with it. You need a wise bo to shoo the con men off. What's the matter with giving me the job—private secretary?"

"Sure," said Charley.

"Ha! What salary?" queried Mr. Teeters greedily.

"Name it," Charley bade him.

Mr. Teeters plunged wildly and named twice what he expected.

"How about fifty a week?"

"You're on," said Mr. Carter. "Get busy."

Mr. Teeters straightened up. His narrow chest expanded, and his nostrils widened to the smell of money. It seemed to him that he was moving in an auriferous haze through which golden eagles took their flight.

"I'll get busy all right," he announced. "I'm the watchdog of the treasury, and I'll bite the pants off any guy who tries to handle me."

With this delivery of his sentiments Mr. Teeters stalked to the door. But Mr. Drew, who had listened first with amusement, then with amazement, stopped him.

"Don't go yet," he requested, and turned to Charley. "Do you mean," he asked, "that you have actually engaged this person to be your secretary?"

"Sure," said Charley grinning tranquilly. "Merciful Skeeters. Wise. Keeps his fingers crossed. Save me lots of trouble."

Mr. Drew stared at the millionaire he had created.

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"Heaven help me!" he gasped, and could say no more.

Mr. Teeters crackled derisively. He turned to go; then, with a sudden inspiration, wheeled.

"Say, Come-On! How about a band of music to make a noise?"

"Good scheme," said Charley.

"And booze all around for the boys, hey? We got to do something in memory of your Uncle Bill."

"Sure thing," assented Charley. "Good old sport. Buy the bar. Light everybody up."

Mr. Teeters challenged Mr. Drew with his eyes, but the lawyer had abandoned himself to the course of events. His vest was surging now to the peril of all its buttons.

"A happy thought," he agreed. "Better than storied marble or imperishable bronze. Go to it, Skeeters, and illuminate the populace. And don't forget our wine."

He lay back in his chair as Mr. Teeters went out, and laughed himself to tears. And in this state Mr. Buck Tompkins, of the *Evening Star*, hurrying to get the story that had broken, found him a moment later, with Come-On Charley imperturbably waiting for the fit to pass.

III

IT WAS Mr. Tompkins who put Hamilton on the map that day, and turned on the spotlight. It was not his story in the *Star* that did it, flaming though it was with hurtling headlines—it was Mr. Tompkins's despatch to the New York *Evening Scream*. That was his prettiest piece of work to date, and the *Scream* played it up on the front page until it shrieked attention; and then the *Scream* ordered its funny man and a staff photographer to the scene, and the other papers did the same.

It was also Mr. Tompkins who, toward four o'clock in the afternoon, long after Mr. Drew had laughed himself back to New York, and when Mr. Teeters was exhibiting marked signs of being "lighted up"—it was Mr. Tompkins who suddenly discovered that Mr. Carter was missing.

They were in Parlor B. This apartment, with an adjoining bedroom and bath, had been retained by the sagacious Mr. Teeters for his millionaire employer. The rooms were crowded. Beer and whisky flowed in the Bennett's bar as free as grace at a camp meeting, but in these chosen precincts wine was served. The thoughtful secretary had caused the bathtub to be filled with ice, and bottles were planted in it as plentifully as preëlection pledges—and soon to be as empty.

Mr. Teeters had just opened a fresh quart, and with several kindred spirits was lifting up his voice in song, when Mr. Tompkins unfeelingly broke in on it.

"Teet!" he yelped, as he came up.

"'Way down upon the Su-wanee river'," responded Mr. Teeters melodiously.

"Shut up!" enjoined the *Star* man. "I want to see you."

"Have a look," invited Mr. Teeters passionately. "I'm the man who invented spending money."

Mr. Tompkins reached forth, and seizing the secretary by the ear plucked him rudely from the bosom of his friends.

"Come over here," he growled, and led him to an unoccupied corner. Then he snapped out: "You're a fine watchdog of the treasury! Where is it?"

Mr. Teeters rubbed his ear and wiggled his mustache.

"Where is what?" he asked plaintively.

"The treasury, you lollop—Come-On Charley. He's gone! Somebody's pinched him."

"Pinched?" Mr. Teeters stared wildly about him. "Who done it?"

"If I knew do you think I'd be standing here talking to a candidate for the booby house?" retorted Mr. Tompkins. "A *Scream* man is due on the four o'clock to see the show, and here the headliner's bumped off the bill! It puts me in Dutch."

Mr. Teeters recovered his sobriety as one might a mislaid glove. It was wonderful.

"Ha!" he snorted. "It ain't going to put me in Dutch. I'm going to find Come-On. I got to. He's got a checkbook and a fountain pen with him—they'll shake him down till he won't have a feather left in his tick."

So saying, Mr. Teeters proceeded energetically to claw a passage for himself through the crowd to the door, and Mr. Tompkins comfortably followed in his wake.

Meanwhile Charley sat in state in Room Thirty-two. He had managed to reach that haven unobserved, and was welcomed

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by Mr. and Mrs. Maginnis as they would have a bright and shining angel—as indeed they proposed speedily to make him. Wine which he himself had amiably caused to be sent up to the company stood at his elbow, and the place where he sat might be likened to an island entirely surrounded by Blondes. There were eight of them, charming girls—Mr. Maginnis being the impeccable authority for it—and refined, as any one could see; also powdered and rouged in the way peculiar to the best families in the land, from which—again relying on Mr. Maginnis—they had come.

"Can you beat 'em?" he demanded vehemently of his guest as the ladies finished a little syncopated *chanson* to Mrs. Maginnis's pianoforte accompaniment. "They oughter be on Broadway this minute, makin' some of those would-be's sound like a rusty saw. What?"

"Sure," said Charley. "All stars."

He smiled genially around the circle, but his gaze lingered on Miss Pansy Plover, a slim young thing next him, who shot him a languorous glance from under her beaded eyelashes.

"Pansy," called Mrs. Maginnis, who was not there to lose any tricks, "sing 'When the Lilies Lose their Leaves'."

"Ah!" ejaculated Mr. Maginnis, rolling up his eyes till the whites showed alarmingly. "The way Pansy gets that song over would melt a stone bridge. I seen her make a house cry like a sick kid for its mommer."

Mrs. Maginnis played an introductory bar or two, and Pansy stood up and sang. Her companions helped her out with a chorus, and Mr. Maginnis added a dramatic touch with a well placed sob here and there. He was crying freely when the number ended.

"I can't help it," he apologized, wiping his tears away with a dingy pocket handkerchief. "I'm too tender-hearted—that's the trouble. An' when I think I ain't got the coin to push that girl the way she oughter be, why——"

He got up abruptly and betook himself to replenishing the glasses to hide his emotion. Charley did not attempt to conceal his.

"Shame!" he gulped. "Bully voice. All bully," he added generously.

Mr. Maginnis suspended operations to survey with pride the group of erubescent heads.

"Didn't I say they was canaries?" he earnestly begged to be informed. "What? Didn't I, Charley?"

Pending Mr. Carter's answer the canaries, thinking of their salaries, looked at him as if he were a lump of sugar they would very much like to peck.

"Sure," agreed Charley cordially. "Best ever. Let's drink to them—warm birds and cold bottles!" He laughed boyishly and winked at Pansy. "Say! By George, how's that?"

Everybody laughed at the king's good jest, and Pansy, sipping daintily from her glass, passed it to him, saying archly—

"See if it don't taste better than yours?"

"Sure it does," said Charley, sipping in turn. "It isn't wine any more—it's honey!"

"Ellery, what do you know about that?" chirruped Mrs. Maginnis, coming over from the piano and sitting down by her husband.

"Don't ask me," returned Mr. Maginnis. "If I had a thousand of his money—just a thou—I know what I'd do."

"What?" inquired Charley seriously.

The moment had come, but Mr. Maginnis was not the one to rush it foolishly. He lighted a cigar with studied deliberation and said:

"What? I'd put Pansy an' this show on Broadway inside of ten days. That's what!"

"Ellery Maginnis!" cried his wife in shocked protest. "What are you wantin' of a thousand dollars with the show makin' good like it is?"

MR. MAGINNIS laughed sardonically. "Ain't that like a woman?" he demanded of Mr. Carter. "S'pose this show *is* clearin' five hundred a week right along—it's takin' every cent of it to pay for a home we bought out at Long Neck last Fall. A twenty-thousand-dollar estate, sir! It keeps me so short I can't see over a pint cup without standin' on a stool. An' she wonders why I ain't got a thousand in my jeans? Huh!"

He drew moodily at his cigar and lapsed into silence. The blondes centered their gaze on Charley, Miss Pansy's being especially languishing. Then, with a little impulsive movement, she leaned over and whispered to him—

"Gee, boy, can't you see me knocking down the tenpins in the Big White Alley?"

Charley winked at her encouragingly,

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and swinging around to the manager asked, "Would a thousand be enough?"

Mr. Maginnis caught his breath with a little sobbing sound, and Mrs. Maginnis swayed slightly in her chair. It was too easy to be real.

"Well," said the former, when he could breathe again, "we'd get quicker action with two thousand, of course. I'd put on an act with these girls at Bannerstein's that would beat anything on the bill four ways from the jack. We'd pull down three thousand a week as easy as picking fleas off a dog."

Mr. Carter seemed to hesitate—he was thinking of Mr. Teeters—and Mr. Maginnis, to clinch the matter, gave a command to his wife:

"Here, fetch me pen an' paper, Pearl. I want to put this thing down in black an' white. Charley's to get for his two thousand all we make the first two weeks at Bannerstein's an' I'll get all we make the next two. I couldn't do fairer by my own brother. Pansy, sing that new song of yours, 'Happy Hearts Make Happy Homes,' while I'm writin'. I want to know what Charley thinks of it."

Mr. Maginnis wrote and Pansy sang. The finish was almost a dead heat.

"Talk about your caroling canaries! Ain't she the little golden throat?" burst out the manager. Then, without waiting for Mr. Carter's opinion, he called: "Come here, Pansy, girl, an' you, Violet an' Ruby. Put your names here where I've made the marks. We want this paper right—signed, sealed an' witnessed."

While this important business was being transacted Charley produced his checkbook and fountain pen. The song had put Mr. Teeters out of his mind. He wrote a check to Mr. Maginnis's order, and filled in the stub. The documents were exchanged with due ceremony; and then Mr. Maginnis, glancing at his watch, gave a start, but said jovially:

"Well, well, how time flies! I got to get to the theater. What d'ye say to one more song for a wind-up, girls? Sumpin' we all can sing. What?"

"Bully!" acclaimed Charley, and he tentatively cleared his throat. "Do you know 'The Sugar Barrel'? New. Just out."

Mr. Maginnis clutched at a chair for support.

"I be ——," he muttered. But Miss Pansy Plover laughed her merriest and caroled:

"The bottom of the barrel isn't far from the top,
But there's sugar in it all the way between;
You can work from either end and eat until you pop,
But you can't lick the sugar barrel clean."

"Come on, let's have it, Pearl," begged Ruby.

IV

THEY gathered about Mrs. Maginnis at the piano, which was at the farther side of the room from the door. Charley found himself between Ruby and Pansy, and with an arm around each without just knowing how it happened. As they sang the door opened softly, little by little, until, peering in from the hall, were disclosed the amazed countenances of Messrs. Teeters and Tompkins, backed by other faces, wide a-grin, that were strange to Hamilton. Some sixth sense prompted Mr. Maginnis to look around, and at that precise moment an exclamation popped from Mr. Teeters's mouth as if it were a cork.

"Merry Moses!" is what he said.

Mrs. Maginnis's fingers crashed discordantly on the keys, and Charley whirled on his heel, carrying Miss Pansy and Miss Ruby with him like the blades of a vivified propeller. The evening sun streamed through the windows on the group, and a battery of cameras clicked from the doorway. Mr. Maginnis swore and the Blondes shrieked and wriggled out of Charley's embrace, but too late—the scene was immortalized.

Mr. Teeters spoke first.

"We been looking for you everywhere, Come-On," he stated. "What you doing up here?"

He stepped into the room gingerly, as if he were afraid a mine might be sprung on him, or a concealed trap door drop him down into the cellar. Mr. Buck Tompkins and the strangers followed. There was a little gray-haired man among these latter who was smiling queerly to himself.

"What you been doing, Come-On?" repeated Mr. Teeters.

"Singing," grinned Charley. "Singing with the caroling canaries. Want to hear us?"

Mrs. Maginnis prevented a reply. She

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brushed the Blondes aside and confronted the private secretary.

"An' what are we owin' the honor of this call to—in my own private apartments?" she demanded haughtily.

"These are gentlemen from the New York papers to see Mr. Carter," interjected Mr. Tompkins placatingly. "They want to interview him."

"Yes," said Mr. Teeters, his china-blue eyes flashing defiance at the lady. "If you are through using him we'd like to borrow him for a while."

"Ellery!" shrilled Mrs. Maginnis in appeal to her natural protector.

"Aw, put the stopper on it, Pearl!" her husband charged her. He was of no mind to give offense to any one just then. "Mr. Carter's fond of music an' we been givin' him some," he explained ingratiatingly to the company. "We was just breakin' up when you come in."

He made a movement which he hoped would be taken for dismissal, but Mr. Teeters, who had been looking about him suspiciously, gave a cry and pounced upon an object lying on the table. It was Charley's checkbook.

"Buck," he screeched, "they been milking him! Look at this! The ink ain't dry! Two thousand bones! Gollamighty!"

Mr. Teeters glared at the manager of the Soulful Singing Blondes, and wiggled his mustache ferociously; but the gentlemen of the press showed pleasure in this development, for here were plot and action. They licked their lips and looked at Charley. Mr. Maginnis interested them only as a minor character in the play.

Charley walked up to his secretary and held out his hand for the checkbook.

"Guess I'll take care of that, Skeeters," he said pleasantly.

"Come-On," pleaded Mr. Teeters, "lemme keep it for you. You ain't fit to be trusted with it; honest, you ain't. I leave it to Buck. I told him somebody'd shake you down if I wasn't handcuffed to you—and they done it!"

"Hand it over," invited Charley.

"It's that cheap theatrical skate there that done the trick," went on the secretary, ignoring his employer's request. "Shook a whole bagful of bones outer your box the first crack he got at you."

Charley's other hand suddenly shot out. Mr. Teeters' arms were pinioned to his sides, and he was lifted straight up from the floor and jounced down again on his feet like a a pile driver.

"You're fired," announced Mr. Carter calmly; and taking his property from the half-stunned man's nerveless hand he restored it to his pocket.

A clicking camera—the *Scream's*—had caught the climax of the action, and the reporter for that sheet queried nervily—

"What did you fall for—I mean, what did you give up the two thousand for, Mr. Carter?"

"Business deal," said Charley. "Going to put these ladies on Broadway. I get all they make the first two weeks. Written contract."

"Played for a sucker!" groaned Mr. Teeters from the chair into which he had collapsed. The Blondes sniffed at him, and Mr. Maginnis, seeing himself supported by his victim, spoke up caustically.

"I guess that'll be about all from these people, Charley. What?"

The little gray-haired man had been whispering with Mr. Tompkins, and now stepped forward.

"I've been looking for a novelty," he said briskly, "and came out here with these boys on the chance of getting it. Mr. Carter, if I give these ladies an immediate New York engagement would you—er—be willing to appear with them, say for five minutes at each performance? Just to introduce them, you know?"

Charley glanced a question at the astonished Mr. Maginnis, who nodded mechanically.

"Sure," he answered.

"Would you be willing to have this singing-act headlined with your name, say—" the little man hesitated—"say as 'Come-On Charley's Caroling Canaries'?"

Charley looked at the newspapermen. They grinned at him encouragingly, and he grinned back.

"Surest thing you know," he said. "Tickled to death."

"I suppose," smiled the other, "money is not an object with you, Mr. Carter—" a moan from Mr. Teeters punctuated the observation—"but if you will open on Monday with me for a two-weeks' engagement I can make the act what would ordinarily be considered an attractive offer."

"How much?" came explosively from Mr. Maginnis.

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"Five thousand a week; and I will hand Mr. Carter right off my check for the first week."

"Say," cried Mr. Maginnis hoarsely, "who are you, anyway?"

"Otto Bannerstein," replied the little man.

"Oh, gee whiz!" exclaimed Miss Pansy Plover ecstatically.

Mr. Maginnis staggered back among his Blondes, and was lost in the radiance of their countenances. Charley, as unruffled as a Stylite on his tower, went over to Mr. Teeters and inquired:

"How about it, Percy? I clean up eight thousand dollars. Who's the sucker?"

"I am," conceded Mr. Teeters meekly.

"Shake!" said Charley, stretching forth a forgiving hand.

Mr. Teeters took it, a little tremulously, and asked—

"Do I hold my job?"

"Sure," said Charley.

AN EVENT

by HAROLD TITUS

THE Winter had been long—and a monotonous cycle of uninteresting repetitions. A series of sunny days gave way to unsettled weather; snow clouds showed above the divide and swept down into the lower country threateningly, lost their portent and passed over, leaving only a light dusting of white; then the staring sun once more, high temperature and bare, brown points. Had it been more severe, Tom Neddar would have profited on two counts: he could at least have stretched more bobcat hides over the smooth boards he prepared for the purpose, and a good storm now and then would have changed the level routine of his living.

Tom's gaunt hounds were good dogs. They could run a cat where most trailers would have quit dead. But the best hound is helpless when the thing he follows has much bare, dry rock to cross; for rock in that condition will not hold scent. When the little dustings came the man went out early in the day, caught an occasional cat, and then watched the tracking snow being licked up before the coming of another mild stretch of weather. A dozen times he predicted a "foot before mornin'," but was invariably wrong, and his pack of pelts grew with exasperating slowness.

But the other drawback was the more severe, for when you live in a one-room cabin, seventy miles from the nearest town, with nothing to do but watch an eventless, open Winter, it is bound to stir your temper. Tom had never been in just such a situation before, and the sensations that resulted were of a strange brand. For the last twenty Winters he had lived and trapped alone. First it was in Maine, then up above Superior, finally down through the Western mountain States. Experiences of

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all sorts had been his, except this—waiting for something to happen and having the waiting endure for weeks.

He had nothing tangible to worry about. The grub supply in the shack would last until July. Even if his Winter's work proved unprofitable he had assurance of necessities back in the bank at Big Fork. He had clothes enough. He had health.

But that monotony!

He formed the habit of putting off breakfast until daylight came, so he could see if anything had changed during the night; but always it was the same rolling ridge of the divide, the same cedar-covered points, the same crooked gulch. Throughout the day he found himself looking for new objects, listening for new sounds—yearning for them.

Once Tom rode over the mountain to the mouth of Ute Tunnel, where a track walker followed out his lonely existence. He stayed overnight with the man and then rode back. He had been used to solitude, could find no satisfaction in human companionship. He wanted the extraordinary! Perhaps it was maturity of a desire that had been growing for years—ever since the novelty of living by himself in lone places wore away. Anyhow, it was strong, irresistible—that craving for something different.

On his ride home from the one visit Tom packed a big bundle of newspapers. He toiled over them night after night, reveling in the tales culled from the high lights of human life. Here and there a murder; next a prize fight; on another page a shipwreck; in the paper over there the report of a flood disaster.

All through the columns, too, ran narratives that recounted the events in the unusual life of Jim Lace, desperado. First it was a post-office, then a small bank, later an express stage, that he held up. Between times a lonely ranch house, from which he took a small amount of money and left bereavement. From one end of Colorado to the other he had been chased; posse after posse had been worn to a raw edge. But always Lace kept ahead—just far enough ahead.

A nasty trail he left, too. Property losses dwindled before the knowledge of his atrocities against human beings. Twice had he taken into his confidence a pal who had helped in his pillaging, and both of those men were found later, faces toward the sky, with eyes that could no longer see. Once he had hidden for days in the isolated cabin of a prospector; at least, that is what they believed after they found the prospector, cold in his bed.

Tom knew all this history by heart, and as late as the fifth time he spelled out the paragraphs that told of the finding of the outlaw's pals, he swore under his breath and his eyes grew hard. However, the tale of the stage robbery made the eyes flame with a softer light; and once, after dropping the paper that recorded it, he laughed aloud.

But the papers grew old and stale; the Lace stories lost charm for him, much as he thought about the bad man. He ceased to care about reading of things that diverted others. He wanted the real, wanted it for himself!

The man commenced to hate his hounds, to curse the ring-boned horses he rode. He dreaded the making of eternal biscuits, the thawing and frying of endless venison steaks. His cabin was first too hot, then too cold. Nothing was right.

Then the stranger came, late in a sunny Winter afternoon, and dropped from his scrawny, lame pony.

"Keep a stopper?" he asked.

Tom agreed, unquestioning, as befits the country, not even inquiring where the rider came from.

The stranger lingered long after the lame pony had commenced to pick up. He complained about conditions—no work. He asked if he could stay on and pay for his grub. Of course, out there in the hills, Tom could not refuse.

Later, though, Neddar came to regret that he had not turned the stranger away. The fellow soon exhausted his topics of conversation and appeared to take no interest in any that Tom ventured. He was no company, but sat for hours at a time staring into the fire, apparently unmindful of conditions about him.

Tom had splendid opportunity to study the man, and as wonder about him began to grow strong he commenced to gather, bit by bit, fragmentary evidence, fitting scattered phrases together, puzzling over what trait of character they might delineate, striving to put the man in his proper category. Like all who live in the big places, he possessed a keen ability to analyze

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character. The recognition of a stray remark's value, the putting of a cunning question the next day or the next week, another when that had been forgotten; listening, watching, letting nothing pass unnoticed, always suggesting, always absolutely certain before accepting from the mass of material he gathered: that was the process. Gradually the story built itself; surely the theory was justified. It was a poor game, and slow. It added to Tom's want of greater excitement, made him impatient, made him prone to take a long chance to break the changelessness of his world; but the good balance of his real self held the trapper back. Winter wore on its sodden way; now and then a cat, but always the round of days—and the silent stranger.

Tom came to hate the man. This joined his restlessness and made him doubly uncomfortable. He found himself inventing vile names for his guest. Days at a time no word passed between them, but always Tom studied and planned and wondered. When it became unbearable, Tom broke into words with his protest against the monotony. After a time he realized that this grumbling helped matters, so he made it stronger than ever, recounting those thrills of other days, damning the Winter that spread about them for a useless stretch of unprofiting weeks.

ONE night Neddar hung up the dishpan with a bang, walked to the antlers that served as a gun rack and took down his two Colt forty-fives. He threw them on the table beside the lamp, brought a bottle of machine oil and set to cleaning.

The stranger before the fire looked up after a little. He studied Tom's clouded face, brow furrowed, mouth drawn in a nasty line, eyes savage. It went well with the mood that had made the hunter storm at the famine of events.

"What's goin' on?" the stranger asked.

No answer.

"What you gettin' ready fer?" he insisted.

Tom lifted a slow gaze.

"Nothin'—much," he muttered.

Silence for half an hour. Then the voice of the stranger again—

"Must be important."

The fresh chunk of piñon wood had an opportunity to blaze brightly before Neddar spoke again.

"Well—mebby so. You'll find out some day." Then he fixed his on the face of the stranger and asked slowly, with import, "Could you keep a secret?"

"Yes," he answered. "Why?"

"I'm goin' to hold up th' Denver Mail tomorrow night."

It was as though he had remarked that they would have hot cakes for breakfast. Then he added: "Trouble won't come to me, so I'm goin' to trouble. Anythin' fer a change!"

The stranger arose and walked slowly across the room to the table.

"You want any help?"

Tom studied the chamber he held in his hand and rubbed vigorously at a spot of rust.

"I dunno—mebby. That's why I mentioned it."

"It's a big job fer one man," the other argued quietly. "Better le' me in."

For another long interval Tom considered.

"I'll have to think it over."

"What if you didn't, an' I'd squeal?" asked his guest.

Neddar's gaze was of contempt.

"I don't s'pose I ever thought o' that, did I? No! Well, you won't leave until I do," he said significantly. "The town's seventy miles off; nearest telephone fifty. I'll ride th' best horse. Figger it out fer yourself. If you can't—mebby I'll explain later."

The stranger did not sleep that night. Nor did Tom's eyes close, though he breathed regularly and lay still, feeling a joy over the fact that happenings were on the horizon.

When morning came Tom went about the work according to established custom. The other ventured no questions. They ate without words, washed the dishes, split wood, packed water. Outwardly, Neddar gave no indication that he planned to do anything but go through this day as he had gone through countless others.

At noon he caught his horse while the stranger looked on from the cabin door. As Tom stooped to pick up the cinch, he called—

"If you want to, saddle your horse."

Tom outlined their brief plans while they rode over the trail. The Denver Mail was

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due to reach the portal of Ute Tunnel at seven fifty. They could take straight south from there and run for New Mexico. They would bother with nothing except registered mail unless the express messenger gave up his keys without trouble. Tom was opposed to shooting unless necessary. The stranger agreed with him.

They rode slowly, for plenty of time remained. After crossing the railroad they tied their horses in a clump of cedars and squatted on their spurs to wait for darkness.

"Track walker comes down thirty minutes ahead," said Tom after the sun had disappeared. "We'll use his lantern."

Night came down on the long silence between the men. Tom leaned his back against a gnarled tree and breathed lightly, keenly alert, expecting anything. The stranger was restless and moved about in the blackness there under the thick growth, finally walking over to the waiting horses. Tom arose and listened with all the tension he could bring to bear on the sense of hearing. He heard movements of a horse and the stranger's voice, raised to quiet the animal.

"They all right?" Neddar asked when the other came back.

"Uh-huh."

"Movin' 'round any?"

"Oh, mine snorted an' stepped a mite when I come up. Yourn 's asleep, I guess."

Just like their other snatches of conversation, seeming idle, useless. If Tom felt sure he had heard a shod hoof strike stone and that the fore feet of his animal were the only ones of the eight over there that bore shoes, he made no comment.

When the lonely inspector of tracks neared the shack slapped up against the mountain there, he was seized from behind, carried to it and made prisoner, bound and utterly helpless.

The engineer of the Denver Mail gave his lingering whistle for the tunnel as his headlight swung around the abrupt curve. Then he drew his head into the cab and swore as his hands reached out in deft motions. The train came to a stop just where the lantern had been swinging.

Before the wheels ceased to turn, silently except for hard breathing, a man climbed into the cab. In one hand he held a menacing forty-five. Once up the steps he produced another. About his mouth and jaw a silk handkerchief was bound, the hat pulled low over his eyes. The engine men threw up their hands and waited. From the rear came two sharp whistles; then the sound of a broken air connection.

"Pull ahead," said the masked man, almost gently.

Slowly the big locomotive, drawing only the mail car, rumbled through the tunnel. The fireman stood in the gangway, hands still up. The engineer was highly conscious of a muzzle pointed at the spot directly between the tips of his shoulder blades.

"Now stop!"

There was snap to the voice, as if the hold-up man had become suddenly irritated, and the wheels slid on the rails. The bandit backed down the steps, covering both with one gun.

"Get down an' unhook that car!" he said to the fireman.

"Keep yer head out o' that window!" he warned the engineer.

He then dropped to the ground himself, backed off a few steps and watched the fireman walk stiffly back, uncouple the mail car and, on orders, march stiffly to the cab again.

"Pull ahead—fast!" the gunman ordered, and the locomotive slid off into the darkness.

The mail clerks stood at the far end of the car, hands up. A spread-legged man held them under cover of a rifle. When the second masked man entered through the door, carrying in one hand a single blue automatic, he said: "I'll hold 'em quiet. You go through the mail."

THE other dropped his gun and dived for the piles of mail sacks. Even as he tugged at the first a chilling circle of cold metal pressed against the back of his neck.

"Quit it, you cheap bum!" he heard Tom Neddar say. "Quit it! Point them hands at th' stars, you bad *hombre!*"

Tom jerked off the muffler that had done for a mask. He forced the other to stand against the side of the car, never taking his eyes from him.

"Any more weepons in this here outfit?" Tom asked.

"Lots of 'em," some one said, and from the tail of his eye Neddar saw a clerk dive for the gun rack and another advance toward him, reaching for the forty-fives that bulged in his chap pockets.

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"Git .somethin' else!" he warned, not turning his head. "They ain't no good. This *bad* man here—he took an' filed th' pins down las' night, holdin' 'em ag'in' him in bed, thinkin' I couldn't hear. An' me a-lyin' there with this automatic 'n my fist nine hours, *waitin'* for him.

"Git that Winchester. Stick this here gent up. His name's Lace—Jim Lace, th' bad man! Th' feller that throws down his pals! Th' feller that never overlooks a bet—from filin' down firin'-pins to cuttin' his pal's cinch until she holds by one string, an' hobblin' his hoss so they ain't no chance of his makin' a getaway.

"Gwan, you squaw," he snarled, as the man he covered raised a voice in protest. "Think I didn't know you lied? Think I didn't know 'twas my hoss steppin'? Think I'd pass up lookin' at him 'fore we got th' track walker—me, who knowed you, you skunk! You wasn't goin' to give me half a fightin' chanct agin you, an' you fixed it so if you missed fire on me, they'd git me from behind.

"I knowed yer breed. I figgered it all out yesterday, an' weeks before. I heard you git them guns when you thought I slept. I knowed you filed 'em down, an' I knowed nobody but you'd do it, so I come through with this here deal."

Lace stood still, eyes closed, face pallid.

"*Lace!*" whispered one of the clerks, awed. "How'd you do it?"

"You seen it," Tom answered. "He tried to double-cross me!"

"But why—how——"

"You don't think he'd le' me take him to town, do you? Naw! I had to fool him, th' bum!" Tom laughed silently. "Ain't another place in th' West where we could o' pulled it off, neither—leavin' th' rest other side o' that tunnel, like as not scared stiff!" He laughed again. He sat down on a chair. "I been waitin' all Winter fer somethin' to happen. Now it has."

He shook out the scarf that had masked him and tied it about his throat. Then he peered into the night.

"He's comin' back—slow, like," he chuckled, gazing up the track at the returning locomotive. Then, soberly: "Better hurry up an' get thet track walker ontied! He won't let *me* sleep none tonight."

"Tonight?" cried one of the others.

"Sure! I won't go back to camp tonight."

The man laughed shrilly.

"Well, I should hope *not!* Man, you come on with us. They'll want you in Denver—the man who got Lace after every sheriff in the west half of the State's tried an' had to quit!"

Tom looked at him soberly.

"No," he said after a pause. "No, I can't do it. Looks like snow. I gotta git back home an' catch a cat 'fore it goes—been a bad Winter."

"Great hat! There's a thousand dollars in it for you!"

Tom sighed, as if worried.

"I *got* to get back. Why, my houn's ain't been fed! Tell you—have 'em leave word fer me with th' track walker. I'll be over again when th' snow goes, but while it's Winter—well, I jus' *got* to stick to work!"

And he buttoned his jumper decisively.

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DATO VATAO, FAN

by DWIGHT L. LOUGHBOROUGH

WHEN the New York Giants and the Chicago White Sox landed in Manila on their world tour quite possibly they met Dato Vatao. At least it may be taken for granted he witnessed every game the two famous baseball teams played in the metropolis of Luzon.

Incidentally, it may be mentioned, Muggsy McGraw and the Old Roman might learn something from Dato Vatao about how to win a game. That old warrior of the wilds of Mindanao is one of the most enthusisatic baseball fans that ever heaved a pop bottle at an umpire or stood all night in the rain waiting to buy a ticket to a world's-series game.

Dato Vatao is little, ugly, withered, old—how old not even he himself has the remotest idea; but quick as a cat. He is as churlish an old devil as ever swung a *barong* and chewed betel nut. But he is a bug—a confirmed baseball bug, even if he is a Moro, and a dato at that.

It was a long time ago, as we calculate the flight of the years in these swift-paced days, that Dato Vatao became a fan. It was in the fall of 1898, shortly after the fiasco which culminated in the surrender of Manila to the American army of occupation, that Dato Vatao was inducted into the mysteries of baseball, and the virus of a bug was injected into his blood.

And ever since then he has been a bug, an obnoxious fan. For almost sixteen years now, he has been fanning for the most part of twenty-four hours a day—when he has not been hunting *cachilas* with a *kris* or a *barong*.

At the time the members of the Astor Battery made their famous pistol charge and the Thirteenth Minnesota Infantry recaptured their guns for them from the Spaniards Dato Vatao was a guest of the Spanish Government in Manila. That is to say, the chaps who had been running things down in Mindanao, including "Papa" Arolas at Jolo, thought they had the goods on Vatao, and so he was invited to make a trip to the Great City to visit the Governor General. The Americans found Dato Vatao chained to an iron post in a dark cell in Bilibid prison; he probably would have lived another fortnight there.

An embargo having been declared on all southern ports of the archipelago on account of the unrest among the natives of the different tribes and on the different islands, it was impossible for Vatao to get back to his native heath, even had he been possessed of the necessary funds with which to purchase a steamship ticket and the physical strength

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to endure the hard traverse down the China Sea. So Vatao found himself in service for American soldiers. A ruler of some five thousand people—men, women and children—he became the servant of a lot of "high privates."

In his own country he had ruled with an iron hand. It was said of him that he often had cut off a slave's head just to try a new *barong*. He was crafty, cunning, cruel in a superlative degree, was Data Vatao. As "Tao," man of all work for A Company, Battalion of Engineers, he was quite a docile, well behaved *Indio* who knew his place and kept it.

"My, my, my!" ejaculated Captain Shunk when first he saw "Tao." "And so that's one of those savage Moro devils, is it? And we're afraid of them, are we? I'm quite befuddled."

In a big field just across Calle Real from the Luneta there were played in those days some of the most exciting baseball games of which history has any record. A league? Two or three of them—and every one a "major" organization. There were teams from the Tenth Pennsylvania Regiment, under the directing hand of dear old "Dad" Hawkins; the First Colorado Infantry; the First Nebraska Infantry, chaperoned by Harry Owry, of Cornhusker football fame; the First California, Thirteenth Minnesota, Second Oregon, First Montana, First Tennessee, First Idaho and First Washington Regiments; the Fourth Cavalry and the Utah Light Artillery, and the Astor Battery under Captain Marks.

There were a lot of other teams, but I've forgotten what outfits they were from—and anyway, this is a story about Dato Vatao.

It was part of "Tao's" job to drive a little flea-bitten pony down to the commissary depot every afternoon for rations for the Engineers' mess. Sergeant Koch generally went in his own *carromata*, leaving "Tao" to get down as he pleased with the cart in which the day's supplies were to be hauled to the Convento de Malate, where the Engineers were quartered. And so it was that—because of an enormous crowd in the street one day, which prohibited the passing of "Tao's" cart—the savage Dato of Mindanao came to see his first baseball game.

When he finally was located by a detail of the Fourteenth Infantry sent out to look for a runaway Gugu and a flea-bitten pony, he was fanning with a bunch of hollow-chested Tagalogs after the manner of a man from the West Side in Chicago when he meets a man from New York, and somebody mentions the Cubs or the Giants. You know how it is yourself.

After that "Tao" refused to do any work in the afternoons. He refused to do any work after eleven o'clock, in point of fact, as it took him an even hour to eat his midday meal, thirty minutes for a siesta, and thirty minutes to get down to the baseball field and find for himself a comfortable seat about in line with first base.

TALK about pests! Dato Vatao became the worst pest one could imagine. He wasn't satisfied with just ordinary fanning. He insisted on jerking you around first one way and then the other, and gesticulating with the two long, scrawny arms of him in a manner which militated not only against one's peace of mind, but against personal security as well.

"Him Montan' man on secon', him —— fool. Ho! Catch 'em like dis!" There would be a lot of arm-swinging. You would be caught by the lapel of your coat and turned half 'round. "T'row like dis! —— fool! Why he not t'row 'em home? Ho! Let 'em man on third come in. Ho!"

Another time he might grasp you with both hands and push you back against a stone wall. For a few seconds he would stand glaring at you in a way which would make your blood run in streams of ice water and your knees wobble.

"Ugh! Him Californ' peetser all-same Chink. Ho! Bet 'em *quatro pesos* him strike 'em out Astlo Bat'ry baseman *de primero*. Ho! Three men on bases; score ties already; last half last ins; two mans Astlo Bat'ry him our already. What he do? What that Californ' peetser mans do? Give 'em walk! Ho!"

Dato Vatao was a fan. The only time he didn't fan was when he was asleep, or drunk to the point of stupefaction. I verily believe he will be fanning when he arrives in—wherever it is that Moro datos go after they have shuffled off this mortal coil.

One day there was played a game between the teams of the Tenth Pennsylvania and the Headquarters Staff. The winner was to play the Thirteenth Minnesota Club for the championship of the Corps. An enormous crowd was present, and a more

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cosmopolitan aggregation never witnessed any athletic contest.

There were Americans, of course; there were Spaniards to the number of a thousand or more—prisoners of war at liberty on parole; there were Germans and Tagalogs, Irishmen and Igorots, Chinese and Moros, Englishmen and Ilongots, Frenchmen, Italians, Dutchmen, Japanese, Koreans, Norwegians, Danes, Swedes, Visayans, Russians.

And Dato Vatao, the old Moro warrior, had his accustomed seat just back of the coaching-box near first base.

It was a blistering day in December; it was sticky, stinking hot. The tropical sun burned fiercely in an opalescent sky. But Dato Vatao didn't mind. He yelled himself hoarse. He waved his arms and shook his feet until it seemed the old devil must drop dead. Delirious he was with excitement; shouting, cat-calling, howling, cursing, gesticulating like an infuriated ape.

A wonderful game is baseball. It "gets 'em." It makes lunatics out of staid business and professional men. It changes dignified college professors into jibbering idiots.

The Headquarters bunch was getting the worst of it. The score early in the fourth inning stood six to nothing in favor of "Dad" Hawkins' coal miners. (It does beat the Dutch how they can play ball in Pennsylvania, doesn't it? And most of 'em Irishmen, at that!)

Artie True, a telegraph operator at the Palace, was doing the heaving for Headquarters, and the Pennsylvanians were knocking him all over the one-hundred-acre field. Artie was crying softly, and swearing like a pirate. They never did anything like that to him back in Tecumseh. Not by a darn sight!

The Corps commander, from his seat in a handsome victoria just back of third base, was scowling, growling, and tugging at his choppy whiskers. It was a rout. Colonel Hawkins' "flat heads" were making monkeys out of the pride of the American army in the Philippines. It never would do!

"Captain!" bawled the Corps commander, addressing an aide who sat on a little yellow pony near the victoria's rear off wheel.

"Yes, General." The Captain saluted and brought his mount alongside the commanding officer.

"Call that ivory-headed boob out of the box. In a few minutes more there won't be another baseball in town. Those infantrymen have knocked half a dozen of 'em out of sight already. Get another pitcher!"

"I—I—— That is, General, you see——" began the Captain. The General interrupted him.

"Anybody! Somebody! Quick!"

The crowd cheered The officers from Headquarters groaned. Big Bill Bump, of K Company, had knocked out a home run, with two men on bases. The score stood nine to nothing, with no one out.

A big, powerful man in khaki trousers and a white silk shirt got up from the ground near the General's carriage. He wore a broad-brimmed Panama hat and patent-leather riding-boots.

A magnificent specimen of humanity he was. Six feet five inches tall he stood, and broad across the shoulders of him as the back of a seven-passenger touring-car—and as thick through the chest. Long of arm and big of hands and feet, he appeared to be a veritable giant.

"Beggin' your pardon, Gen'ral," he boomed in a voice that threatened to jar loose every nut on the victoria. The General turned on him quickly, surprised. "You-all is lookin' for somebody to go in there and stop that bombardment, ain't yuh?"

"Can you——" the General began, and ran a critical eye up and down the powerful frame of the stranger. He noted the man's thewy forearms, revealed through the thin silk sleeves of his shirt; the muscles bulging under the tight-fitting trousers.

"I have played ball a little," answered the stranger, and smiled. A slow, irresistible smile it was. The General waved a hand in the direction of the pitcher's box.

"Can you——"

"I cain't say for sure, Gen'ral, but I reckon them Pennsylvanians is wallopin' 'em because they're all slow curves. Now if I go in and just heave 'em over—and change my speed off and on—I reckon——"

"Hurry! For the love of Moses!"

The Captain had called to the umpire. The umpire had called time. Artie True was staggering off the diamond in the direction of the Headquarters substitutes, who lay sprawling under a big parasol, angry, disconsolate.

"Hustle!" screamed the General.

"But, General," began the Captain, "who is this man? Is he—eligible?"

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"Name's Spencer—Jack Spencer," volunteered the stranger.

"Soldier?" asked the commanding officer.

"Reckon not."

"Sailor?"

"No."

"American?"

"Missourian."

"Show 'em!"

"But, General," protested the Captain, "the rules——"

"—— the rules! Spencer, I hereby appoint you a civilian scout from Headquarters—anything! Get in there. Quick!"

"Ho!" ejaculated Dato Vatao as he watched the big man sauntering across the diamond to the pitcher's box. "Him big *hombre*. Ver' big. *Diablo alto, segure!* Too big! Him fall down. Ho!"

Dato Vatao had wagered six pesos with a Chinese cook at Colonel Potter's residence that the Headquarters team would win. Naturally he was interested in any changes in the line-up.

"Jack Spencer, a civilian scout, is now pitching for Headquarters!" announced the umpire, making a trumpet of his hands.

"Who the —— is he?" howled the Pennsylvania fans.

"O-o-o-oh!" groaned the Headquarters adherents. "He'll get in his own way! Take him out! Take him out!"

"Play ball!" shouted the umpire, and tossed the ball to Spencer. So big were the stranger's hands that his fingers curved over the sphere until it was entirely hidden.

THE stranger threw his hat on the ground, waved his right arm in a wide circle several times and faced the batter. Slowly he leaned his ponderous body backward. A hush fell over the great crowd. Spencer delivered the ball. The catcher staggered and fell in a heap.

"What you think you're doin,' eh?" he managed to say after a minute, and walked slowly toward the pitcher.

"I reckon I'm pitching a ball game."

"Ho!" shouted Dato Vatao, and rubbed his shriveled old hands together gleefully and glanced in the direction of the Chinese cook. "Him all-same gun on war *proa*. Sometimes knock house down."

"I wasn't set. You didn't signal," expostulated the Headquarters catcher.

"Well, then, get set." Spencer grinned.

"Watch him, Jimmy!" called the Pennsylvanian on the coaching-line. "He ain't got nothing. Make him put it over."

"Strike two!" the umpire bawled.

"Rotten!" howled the Pensylvania fans. "It was wide a mile."

"Ball one."

"That's the eye, Jimmy!"

"Ball two."

The Pennsylvania fans cheered lustily and hooted with derision. The General groaned. Spencer grinned and asked the umpire for a bite of tobacco.

"That's the eye, Jimmy, old boy! Make the big stiff put 'em over the pan!"

Spencer wound up like a corkscrew, and his great right arm swung like the spoke of a revolving wheel.

"Strike three; batter out!"

The Pennsylvanians groaned; the General jumped up and down in the victoria and so far forgot his military dignity as to let out something very much like a cheer. It was as if a maddened bull had bellowed.

"He has the wing, Captain!" the General shouted, and waved his campaign hat.

The next man up struck at the first one; was given three-fourths of a pass and then hit the next one. It would have been a two-bagger except that "Kid" Varney, an Engineer sergeant from Headquarters, ran fifty yards in something less than six seconds, jumped into the air about three feet and came down on his neck with the ball tightly clutched in his left hand.

The patients in the Second Reserve Hospital moaned; the stewards and doctors shook their heads and declared that there wouldn't be a man left in any of the wards. That yelling in Ermita was enough to kill a well man.

The next man up hit to short and was out at first. Dato Vatao ran out on the diamond howling like a locoed baboon.

"Get back there, you old Gugu!"

"Down in front! Kill the big stiff!" Meaning Spencer.

The crowd was in a perfect frenzy. Every mother's son was on his feet, screaming, dancing, gesticulating.

Some one grasped Dato Vatao by the scruff and pulled him back to his seat.

"Him all-same monsoon, typhoon! Ho! Him *diablo alto* all right!"

"Kill the ringer!" howled the Pennsylvanians. "Kill the pitcher!"

"No can kill *diablo alto*," answered Dato

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Vatao hoarsely. "Him all-same *tulisan*. Him got 'em *itang itang*."

The old savage clapped his hands, rolled his eyes, jerked his head one way and then another, jabbered without ceasing. He cursed in six languages and chuckled like a mechanical toy duck.

Tommy Caruthers, perhaps the poorest batter in the Eighth Army Corps, was the first batter up for Headquarters. He swung on the first ball pitched and went to second. Pandemonium reigned. (One has to dig into the "cannery" to describe a baseball game—unless one is a sporting-writer. Then one coins words.)

"Balloon's gone up!"

"Balloon's gone up!"

It became a chant, and then a roar as of rushing waters. Men of all nations jumped to their feet and yelled like men distraught. One was reminded of what it must have been at the Tower of Babel when came the confusion of tongues.

Obviously the "psychological moment" had arrived. The Pennsylvanians, with their lead of nine runs, were not so cocksure—with five innings yet to play. And with that speed marvel pitching for Headquarters——

Hank Henshaw, who made the Tennessee mountains famous for squirrel-hunting, was next up. He approached the plate with a broad grin on his lantern-jawed face, swinging a heavy bat above his head, as an Irishman swings a shillalah. Now Henshaw was famous for shooting squirrels, but his ability as a batsman had not made him greatly sought after by the baseball magnates in the States.

But something had happened that day. The balloon must have gone up, as the crowd kept shouting. Anyway, Hank caught the ball squarely on the nose for a single to left, scoring Caruthers. Jack Roberts, a civilian clerk, sacrificed; Bob Graham made two bases on a miserable error by the Pennsylvanian in center field, and Henshaw ambled home singing "Dixie" at the top of his voice.

Jimmy Mason hit a line drive to third which should have been an out; but the third baseman, a stubby little fellow from Pittsburgh, dropped the ball, fell on top of it and rolled twice over before he could recover it. By that time Mason was safely on first. Culver hit a clean single to right, and Graham scored. It was a rout. The Pennsylvanians were up in the air for fair. They were "full o' *chandoo*," Dato Vatao asserted.

Bobby Harper, the best hitter in the islands, was the next man to come to the plate. The ball never was found. The Pennsylvanians' lead had been reduced to three runs. The next two men flied out, retiring the side.

There has been a lot of noise made in Manila, at one time and another. But never before or since has there been such a racket, such an ear-splitting racket, as those fans made that day in Ermita.

It is said that Admiral Dewey, aboard the *Olympia* in the bay, signaled his fleet to trim ship and get up steam, in the belief that a mutiny and a rebellion of Gugus had broken out at one and the same time.

The big cruiser *Powerful*, belonging to her Majesty's Navy, let fly a bundle of red flags at the top of her mainmast; and the *Princess Wilhelmina*, anchored peacefully off the Pasig Light, began vomiting great clouds of black smoke as the German Emperor's cruiser prepared to go into action.

The walls of the "Old City" seemed to totter and the very earth to tremble. The insurrectos on San Juan del Monte imagined that the end of the world was at hand.

AND the noisiest of all the thousands of frenzied fans watching that ball game was Dato Vatao. He jumped up and down on his old legs, waving his arms and screaming at the top of his cracked voice.

"B'loon sup! b'loon sup! b'loon sup!" he shouted. "B'loon sup! Him *diablo alto* play ball likell."

Spencer sauntered again to the mound in the center of the diamond and stood rolling the ball up and down his right trousers leg, and grinning. A hush fell over the crowd as the first Pennsylvanian up came to bat.

The tall stranger stood looking at him for a moment. Dato Vatao, from his place behind first base, climbed cautiously to his feet, rubbing his hands and chuckling.

"Eat 'em 'baccy. Spit on ball," he coached.

"Shut up!" growled a lanky Kansan.

"You shut up!" the Moro retorted. "Me tell 'em *diablo alto* how to get 'em."

Spencer turned and scrutinized the old savage. Then he laughed and asked the

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umpire for another piece of tobacco. Clutching the ball in both his great hands, he held it in front of his mouth and spat upon it.

"What yuh doin'?" inquired a cavalryman. "Tryin' to eat the pill?"

The crowd laughed. The spit ball had not yet been invented. Dato Vatao chuckled, and slapped his legs as a rooster flaps its wings before it crows.

Spencer began winding up. It seemed an interminable time before he finally had completed the operation. The batter, the best hitter on the Pennsylvania team, was becoming extremely nervous. He stood chopping the air with his bat, and trembling.

"Throw it!" dared the man on the coaching-line.

Spencer's arm shot out in front of him, completing a wide circle. The batter struck viciously. The ball was not half way to the plate. The next ball thrown went like a shot; the batter was a fraction of a second late. A slow out-and-drop sent the man to his seat under the big umbrella.

"What's he got?" inquired a team mate, swinging a couple of bats back and forth.

"Search me!"

The next man up popped out to short. Spencer was pitching like a fiend. He managed, however, to get himself into a tight hole. The third man up hit to deep center and made first. The fourth man hit the first one and beat the ball to first by a nose. The next man up hit out a Texas leaguer, just back of second base.

"Him center fielder all same fool!" exploded Dato Vatao. "Why him not back up second baseman?"

"Shut up!" commanded the Kansan. The Pennsylvanians were howling like Apache Indians at a ghost dance. The bases were full.

"Eat 'em 'baccy!" screamed Dato Vatao. "Chew 'em plenty! Spit 'em plenty! Him ball make plenty slip!"

Spencer grinned and held the ball in front of his face. Then he began again to wind up, in that slow, easy way of his. The crowd now was motionless.

"Strike one!" droned the umpire.

The crowd cheered lustily, then fell again into a silence that was oppressive.

"Strike two!" The batter had struck wildly at a ball which came within a few inches of his Adam's apple—a high inshoot with the speed of a bullet. There was more cheering. The three runners led far off from their bases and were standing on their toes, eager, anxious, with breath bated. Dato Vatao crouched with hands half clutched, like the talons of a vulture.

"Strike three! Batter out!"

It had been a slow outcurve delivered identically as the others had been—a peculiar cross-fire. The batter stood gaping. The crowd went into a paroxysm of delight or rage, according to the individual's favoritism.

In their half of the fifth inning the Headquarters team made two runs. The first man up, little Shorty Deveneau, of the Ordnance Department, was presented with a pass to the first station, as the sporting-writers delight to say. Then it came the stranger's time at bat. He swung on the first one and trotted leisurely around the circuit. It was evident that he could bat, too.

In the last half of the ninth inning, with the score still standing at nine to eight in favor of the infantrymen, Spencer again came to bat with a man on second and two down. Another home run brought in the winning run.

Dato Vatao walked over the heads of several hundred Tagalogs to where a Chinaman was expostulating with a *mestizo* about some *suelto* the latter was jingling in his pocket.

"Give me *dinero*," ordered Dato Vatao. "Him *diablo alto* some peetser. Ho!"

The *mestizo* attempted to explain to the old Moro chieftain that the Chinese cook protested his right to turn the money over to Vatao, claiming that the strange pitcher was not eligible.

"Ho! *Generalissimo*, him say so," declared Vatao. "Whole mob, him say so. Whatinell? Ho!"

The *mestizo* went sprawling, with the Moro atop of him, clutching at his throat. The Chinaman fled, screaming in terror.

The next day the commissary sergeant of A Company, Battalion of Engineers, U. S. A., was looking for a new servant. Dato Vatao was locked up, charged with robbery and assault with intent to commit murder.

SEVERAL months passed. Baseball in Luzon was forgotten in the excitement following that memorable night early in February, 1899, when a private of the First Nebraska, on the San Juan Bridge beyond Santa Mesa, fired the

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first shot of what was to be a long, bloody war between the Americans and the Gugus. The baseball field grew up to rank weeds, until it was occupied as a camping-gound by the Sixth Artillery, the Twelfth Infantry and the other organizations that arrived by way of the Suez Canal, to reënforce the battle-worn volunteer regiments. Jack Spencer, the mysterious pitcher, had become a real scout and was at the front with a party of dare-devils.

Dato Vatao had disappeared. It was rumored that he had taken to the hills and put himself at the head of a savage band of Ilongots, after having escaped from Bilibid. But no one knew for certain.

The Engineers mourned him as dead, and held a funeral service in the walled garden back of the Convento de Malate. A lot of "Old Government" was consumed that night, and Paddy Ryan, the canteen steward, said every man in the outfit stretched the limit of his credit. Dato Vatao had been very popular with the Engineers. Big Ed Kirkpatrick and Sergeant Johnston sang a duet, and "Count" La Mar, the official map maker of the Eighth Army Corps, read a eulogy. It was quite an orgy.

II

JACK SPENCER raised his head out of the crook of his right elbow, where he had pillowed it during a short siesta one afternoon, and listened intently. His companions, sitting about him on the ground on a thickly wooded hillside in the Province of Nueva Ecija, turned their heads in the direction of a thicket whence had come a peculiar whistling sound.

"S-s-sh!" warned Spencer, and rolled over on his left side, clutching his carbine in front of him.

"It's Gugus," whispered Harrington, another of the party of scouts.

Like the call of a killdee snipe came again the low whistle. It was answered this time from the opposite direction. Other whistled calls came from still other directions.

Spencer motioned his party to break for the cover of a boulder at one edge of the clearing in which they had sat down to eat their midday meal of "corned horse" and hardtack. Harrington threw himself down beside his chief and pushed over the safety catch of his carbine.

"I'm goin' to stick, Spencer," he said quietly.

"Better beat it," answered the Chief Scout. "Get the men scattered out. It's goin' to be ever'body fer hisself and the devil fer the whole works, Jimmy."

Harrington clutched Spencer's arm with his left hand and pressed it, in token of farewell. That the party was surrounded was evident from the fact that the low, whistled signals had come from several directions. Also he knew that the Malays would not attempt an attack unless they were in superior numbers.

Spencer glanced over his shoulder and smiled at his comrade—that slow, irresistible smile that had won the General's heart that day in Ermita when the big fellow went in and pitched the Headquarters team to victory.

"Beat it!" he commanded, and turned his attention to the thicket directly in front of which the two men lay. "You'll have to hurry. Hear that?"

Harrington heard. It was the weird, blood-curdling cry of the jungle fighters of the hills of Luzon—the most unearthly cry that ever broke from human lips; eerie, sepulchral, nerve-racking, terrifying—the chortle of fiends afar off, thirsty for human blood.

Again came that killdee whistle; and again. The brush in front of the scouts moved almost imperceptibly. The scouts sprang to the cover of the boulder.

The Chief remained prone on his face, clutching his carbine. He watched the brush in front of him with an intentness which would have done credit to a Sioux warrior of the days when Sitting Bull was a youth. The lines of his face deepened and were fixed. The muscles of his huge forearms, from which the sleeves of his blue flannel shirt had been rolled back, stuck out like whip cords.

He breathed so softly as to appear not to breathe at all. Almost perfectly still he lay, waiting, waiting. For what? He could but guess. Or had his sharp eyes penetrated the jungle depths and seen the hidden foe lurking there?

"It's the ——" he began mentally, when a bullet z-z-zipped past his ear and kicked up the dust near his foot. Harrington had reached the cover of the boulder, with the seven others of the party.

"Missoury!" he shouted, and fired at

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random into the brush in front of the Chief.

"It's the big black!" exclaimed one of the scouts with Harrington. He had seen what Spencer must have seen—a tall, broad-shouldered negro, the leader of as crafty and relentless a band of head hunters as ever pulled string of bow to shoot a poisoned arrow, or hurled a deadly spear.

"Lord!" ejaculated Harrington, and fired at a dark object seen indistinctly through the tangled vines and flowering bushes. Several other scouts fired.

"Yes, —— yuh!" came from the brush in guttural, terrible tones. "It's the 'big black.' And, by ——, I'm goin' to git yuh! I'm goin' to get that big Missouri four flusher first!"

Spencer fired. The shot was answered by a sharp cry in the thicket. Then a volley of shots came from half a dozen directions. Two of the most intrepid of the scouts, who had ventured from behind the boulder to get a look at the speaker in the brush, fell dead. A third, peering over the top of the big rock, toppled back moaning. He was mortally wounded.

Spencer leaped to his feet and dashed into the brush. There were more shots from the hidden foes. An arrow chipped off a piece of the boulder in front of the scouts.

"Now, you dirty negro," they heard Spencer exclaim, "it's you and me for it; and——"

There came the sound of a struggle. Harrington started forward to fight beside his Chief. He fell headlong, shot through the head. The others ran away into the woods. Spencer was left alone to fight with the "big black," and probably to die there in the jungle.

For several days and nights Spencer and his little band of scouts had been on the trail of a big American negro who had deserted from the Twenty-fourth Infantry and joined the insurrectos beyond Angeles, whence he had fled into the hills to the eastward, toward the Pacific Ocean.

Riley, they called him. He was a powerful man, fully six feet four inches tall, and big in proportion. Stories of his brutality had come into the American lines from many prisoners who related incidents of his barbarous cruelty to the natives, at the head of several hundred of whom he had placed himself.

Once he struck a woman with the butt of a rifle because she did not cook a meal for him as quickly as he thought she should have done, and crushed in her skull. On another occasion he plunged a knife through the heart of a Filipino soldier because the latter did not salute him promptly.

The devastation wrought by this big negro's band of guerillas was the source of no little concern on the part of the American officers in the field, and was considered of almost equal importance with the much-desired capture of Emilio Aguinaldo, the wily Tagalog leader of the insurgent forces of Luzon, whose capture meant the breaking of the backbone of the insurrection.

A week before, a cavalry squadron, on scout duty, had been ambushed down in the valley and literally cut to pieces by the negro deserter's horde of mongrel Malays and Negritos. Then the marauders had disappeared into the mountains as mysteriously as so many shadows, taking with them a number of Krag-Jorgensen carbines and a large quantity of ammunition.

Spencer had been trying to locate the negro, but never had come closer than a thousand yards, except sometimes at night when the negro would come out on a precipice above the Americans and curse them hideously in the dark, threatening them, bantering them, daring them to follow him farther. Particularly would he address his remarks to Spencer. As thus:

"I reckon I know you, Jack Spencer. I reckon you-all ain't the man you thinks you is. You're a four flusher—that's what you are, you big, long-legged —— Come on up heah, Jack Spencer, an' I'll cut your liver out an' feed it to the dawgs. You ——"

WHEN the Chief of Scouts rushed into the thicket to grapple with the negro—he had been sure from the first that it was the negro—he found himself surrounded by a crowd of barefooted, half-naked Ilongots, who were brandishing spears and ugly-looking knives.

One of them struck him a blow on the side of his head with the broad side of a *barong*. Another pricked him in the back with the point of a bamboo stick. Another threw a handful of dirt into his face. They chattered like a lot of monkeys fighting with a flock of fruit bats. They screamed like little demons and jumped up and down in fiendish glee. Here was the *diablo alto* of the American army—the most feared and most genuinely hated tracker of

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all the *cachila* trackers. And absolutely in their power!

Spencer stood for a moment stolidly looking into the leering face of the big negro deserter, unmindful of the savages about him.

"So!" he exclaimed at length. "It's *you!*"

"I reckon it is," grinned the big negro, and hunched his shoulders. "Bettah put that carbine down, or I'll have to tell them savages to run a crooked knife through your guts."

"I could shoot you before they could do that. But I don't want to kill you—just yet. I have a few things to say to——"

"Yow! Ye! Yoi! Yow!" screamed the savages. The mountains seemed to fall; everything grew black. Spencer reeled backward and fell at the feet of the savage who had struck him on the head with a heavy club. The negro deserter sprang forward with a *kris* poised above his head. He was chortling that weird song of blood-lust of the demons of the Luzon jungles.

"Ho!" cried a voice at the edge of the crowd of savages. "You stop 'em quick! No can touch *cachila*."

A rifle shot rang out, and the *kris* went spinning. The negro's arm dropped; a finger had been shattered by a bullet. With his other hand he reached for his forty-five.

"Down the big negro!" commanded the voice at the edge of the crowd in the tongue of the Ilongot. Several savages hurled themselves on the deserter and threw him to the ground.

"Tie him—hands and feet!" boomed the voice. The savages obeyed, and the big negro lay struggling on the ground with his hands tied behind his back and his feet bound together with bamboo thongs.

"Who's *commandante?*" asked the voice, its owner leaping forward and standing over the American negro. "Ho! Who?"

The negro cursed and continued to struggle against his bonds.

"No use," went on the booming voice in broken English. "No use. Him bamboo string ver' hard. No? Him *negro grande* no can break. Best be still. Ver' still. Fix 'em finner. Hurt some? Ho!"

The speaker was little, ugly, withered, old, yet quick as a cat. He knelt over the negro's prostrate form and bound up the injured finger in a piece of cloth which he tore from the negro's shirt. Then he went to the *cachila*, who had begun to move a little, and to moan.

"Not hurt 'em much. Make 'em forget li'l while. No hurt 'em right arm? Ho! Him monsoon, typhoon—what *cachila* call 'em? Tornado!" The old Malay chuckled and clapped his hands. "Him t'row 'em baseball; knock 'em house down. Ho!"

At the old man's direction the natives made a litter and carried Spencer up the mountain side to a broad plateau hidden by an almost impenetrable labyrinth of jungle. In the center of this plateau was set a cluster of bamboo shacks, built on poles several feet above the ground, and thatched with nipa.

Into the largest of the huts Spencer was carried, and permitted to recline on a sleeping-mat under an open window. He had regained consciousness and was gazing wonderingly at the faces of the curious natives standing around him.

"Ketch 'em *negro grande,*" announced the withered old man who seemed to be the headman. "No like 'em! Take away my Ilongots. Me ketch 'em! You feel pur' good? Ho!"

The old man clapped his hands. A young woman climbed up the ladder to the door of the hut, carrying a large gourd filled with *tuba*.

"You like 'em *tuba?*"

Spencer took the gourd in his hands and looked questioningly at the old savage, who stood before him clad only in a breech clout and a tall silk hat, which he probably had stolen from some rich Spanish planter's home.

"No savvy *tuba?*" the savage asked. "Him make 'em belly feel tickle. Ho!"

Spencer drank the fermented sap of the coconut palm and handed the gourd to the woman who had fetched it. Then he asked of the chief—

"Where is the big black?"

"Him long time gone far. Me no savvy *donde.*"

"You let him go?"

"*Si!* Me no kill 'em *negro grande.* Him all same *demonio.* Me kill 'em, then me *demonio.* Savvy?"

"You——" Spencer scratched his head. "Why did you——"

"No let 'em *negro grande* kill 'em *cachila?* Ho! You see pur' soon. *Cachila* sleep now? Take plenty sleep. Him good stuff, plenty sleep."

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The old man waved his arms and the natives filed out of the hut. The chief followed them, chuckling and rubbing his hands.

Spencer soon found that he was a prisoner, despite the fact that his every want had been supplied, as far as the natives were capable of providing for his creature comforts. He was given cigarettes and *tuba*, boiled rice and dried fish, breadfruit and bananas, coconuts and delicious cantaloupes. Two young natives were assigned to the task of waiting on him, but he was forbidden to leave the hut, which was surrounded by several warriors with bows and arrows and machetes. The man in front was armed with a Mauser carbine.

The American's head pained him not a little during the long hours of the night as he lay, tossing restlessly, on the sleeping-mat. Some time about the middle of the night the old chief entered with a coconut-oil dip and squatted beside the scout. He had brought a woolen bandage made of an American soldier's flannel shirt, and some native ointment in a coconut shell.

"Arm hurt 'em?" he asked anxiously, and unwound the bandage.

"Arm? No, of course not. Head."

"Me fix 'em head—ver' quick. Arm no hurt 'em? *Seguro?*"

"No, I said," repeated Spencer impatiently.

The old man chuckled.

"Why all this—this—— Say, you old geezer, what d'yuh mean? Why this shine to me?"

"Wait! *Mañana* mebbe tell 'em." The old man rubbed the scout's head with ointment and chuckled again. "Arm no hurt 'em? Ver' good." Then he rubbed Spencer's right arm with the ointment and bound it up, from shoulder to wrist, in the flannel bandage. "All same *cachilas* do in Manila. Ho! No ketch 'em cold. Ver' good."

Then he went out, still chuckling. Spencer sat up under the window and looked out at the blinking stars and the Southern Cross, burning low on the horizon.

"Well, I'll be ——!" he muttered at length, and lay down to sleep.

It was broad daylight when he was awakened by a *muchacho*, who brought him a bowl of rice and a gourd filled with *tuba*. The native stood, watching the scout drink the liquor and eat the rice, his eyes like two saucers as he noted the play of the silky muscles of Spencer's right arm as he unwound the bandage and threw it, disgusted, into a far corner of the hut.

Another *muchacho* entered with cigarettes and matches. Still another came in and stood with ox eyes, looking at the American as the latter sat smoking and wondering what it was all about.

THE sun was perhaps an hour high, sizzling above the purple smear of the jungle to the eastward, when there came to Spencer's ears the sound of a crowd of Malays shouting, arguing. Spencer was reminded of a swarm of big, angry bees buzzing in a mesh of orchids high in a gigantic fern. And above the roar of the jabbering, howling natives came the voice of the old chief, talking in half a dozen languages and cursing in a way that would have made a South Sea pirate of the old days ashamed of himself.

After a while the withered old Malay climbed up the bamboo ladder to the door of the American's prison house and stood grinning.

"Bas'ball game. Ho! Ilongots play 'em Macabebes. Bet 'em two carabaos and ten rifles. Me bet 'em ever'sing in *puebla*. Ho! Bet 'em whole—— harem. Pur' girls, too."

Spencer opened his mouth. Then he laughed. Now he understood why he had been treated with such solicitude.

"Me see 'em *negro grande* jump at *cachila* when Ilongot hit 'em with club. Me shoot 'em *demonio's* finner. Him drop *kris*. Savvy? So *cachila* can come up here beat 'em Macabebes. They talk too much. No can play ball. Ho! *Cachila* peetser for Ilongots. *Seguro!*"

Spencer wondered how the old Malay came to know aught of baseball. He asked—

"Ever see Americans play ball?"

"Heap times! See 'em *diablo alto* peetser Tent' Pennsy'van'. Beat 'em likell!"

Spencer climbed to his feet and stood looking down amusedly at the shriveled old Malay chewing betel nut with his yellow fangs. Then he laughed. He had had a lot of narrow escapes from death at the hands of savages in the jungles of Luzon, but never had he dreamed it possible that his ability as a baseball player would save his head.

"So I've been drafted by the Ilongot team of the Central Luzon League, eh?" With

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his head paining him as it did, as a result of the blow he had received the day before, he was dubious.

"No savvy that talk. Savvy bas'ball? Savvy you peetser. You beat 'em Macabebes. No? *Seguro!*" The old man waved his arms about his head. "Him Macabebe no savvy—what you call 'em—cross-fire. No savvy change speed. No savvy peetser wit'—what you call 'em?—noodle. Come! *Cachila* beat 'em Macabebes. They wait now."

"And if I don't beat 'em?" Spencer asked whimsically, and followed after the native. He was wondering if there might present itself some means of escape. He wondered where he was. Who was this funny old Malay, anyway? He never had heard of Dato Vatao of Mindanao.

"You beat 'em!" The chief turned on Spencer with a savage growl, and clutched his hands in front of him after the manner of an enraged baboon. "You beat 'em! Savvy?"

"But suppose——"

"No beat 'em——" The chief shrugged his shoulders.

"Well?" Spencer glanced out through the doorway. He might kill the old savage, but there were half a hundred Ilongots outside who would cut him to ribbons afterward. He glanced back at the open window. A dozen savages were watching him from there. There was no avenue of escape.

"Well?" he asked again.

"You beat 'em—you can have 'em whole harem. Can have gun. Can have *kris*. Can have getaway quick. Ho!"

The chief paused. He rolled his eyes and drew a gnarled, black hand across his throat.

"No beat 'em—cut 'em head off! Savvy?"

Spencer nodded his head and followed down the ladder.

As they were crossing the street of the village to the baseball field the old chief explained to the scout:

"Him Macabebes play team Ilongots. No—what you call 'em?—ringers. You no Ilongot? Make you one den. You chief. Savvy? You *cachila* chief Ilongots. New job, yes. Savvy? All Ilongots say you chief. Tomorrow, no. Today. Savvy?"

Spencer laughed and answered that he did. The crowd of savages following howled in high glee. They seemed to sense that their headman had resorted to some wonderful strategy, but not understanding English they did not know exactly what it was.

The Macabebes were on the diamond batting up flies. There were more than a score of them. Several pitchers—Spencer took them to be pitchers—were warming up along the side lines. It was a strange sight, those black savages in their breech clouts, knee pants and naked bodies, playing baseball as cleverly as would an American team in the States.

He watched a barefooted Macabebe make a long run and catch a high fly just as it was about to strike the ground. The native rolled over twice, still clutching the ball, and threw it—with one knee on the ground—from deep center to first base. The scout had seen few professional baseball players in the States perform a similar feat.

Another Macabebe caught a fly in left field, after having jumped several feet into the air to reach the ball, and threw it to the home plate. Spencer wondered what chance he would have against such an aggregation. They played with skill, agility and cleverness.

A tall, lanky fellow in a khaki shirt and white knee pants walked out to the pitcher's box and began winding up. Spencer stood watching him in amazement.

A short, stocky chap stepped up to the home plate and began swinging a bat. Spencer noted that the balls were regulation baseballs and that the bats, gloves, masks, and body protectors were just the same as those used by American players, although some of them had been made by the natives out of materials they had found in the forests.

The lanky pitcher began to unwind. He let go of the ball. Spencer and Dato Vatao were standing directly behind the home plate. The scout watched the ball come in a straight line to within three feet of the plate. Then it broke beautifully in a sharp outdrop. Another Macabebe in a mask and wearing a chest protector caught it. The batsman muttered, and several of the bystanders laughed.

"Him all-same hellva peetser," remarked Dato Vatao, indicating the lanky Macabebe. "Him all-same Artie True. But him got no speed. Mebbe you savvy? Ho!"

There was a lot of jabbering and gesticulating while Dato Vatao was explaining to

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the Macabebe headman that Spencer had "finished with being *Americano*" and had come to the Ilongots as their chief, supplanting even Vatao himself.

"Ho! Why not?" asked the old man. "He is better man than Vatao. He is young man. Strong! Big! Fight much! Vatao old. Some day die. What Ilongots do without chief? Answer that!"

The Macabebe headman could not answer the argument, so he reluctantly consented to permit Spencer to pitch for the Ilongots.

There were more arguments when it came to the selection of an umpire, and still more when the natives began discussing the rules under which the game was to be played. It finally was decided that if any one but a player picked up a batted ball the runner was to be allowed but a single base; if any one but a player picked up a ball when there was a man on a base the runner was to keep his place as he would if time had been called.

"Then me kill 'em fool pick 'em up ball," muttered Vatao in English.

Spencer wondered how these savages, whom the United States Army was hunting and for whose capture there were medals of honor waiting at Washington, could indulge in sports so unconcernedly. He asked Vatao about it.

"Think 'em Vatao bonehead? Ho! Fi' huner' fighting-men in jungles down mountain side. One trail to here. *Americanos* come must walk single file. Savvy that? Through narrow cut in rocks. Easy cut 'em down. No?" The old man chuckled and rubbed his hands.

THE Macabebes went to bat. Spencer had warmed up with the Ilongot catcher and began "burning them over" at a terrific speed. He struck out the first two men up. The third walked. The fourth went out on a pop-up. The Ilongots cheered frantically.

During their half of the first inning the lanky Macabebe pitcher held the Ilongots to a single hit. The man died on third. The Ilongots kept very still and the visitors howled.

The Macabebes, as Dato Vatao had predicted, could not fathom Spencer's change of pace. They would strike at the first ball after it had passed them. Then they would strike at the next—a slow ball delivered identically as the fast one—before it had gone half way to the plate. His cross-fire puzzled them. His insolent, nonchalant attitude discomfited them. They grew madder and madder as the innings passed, still with no score on either side.

Spencer managed to pitch in superb form until the fourth inning, despite the excruciating pain in his head. Then he began to grow faint and dizzy. He stood for a moment holding his left hand over the sore spot on the back of his head and gritting his teeth. His face had gone white.

He was trembling and seemed to totter. Vatao watched him out of snapping black eyes. Pedro Garcia, a *mestizo* who played third for the Macabebe warriors, came to bat. Spencer no longer could control the ball. He threw wild, half blinded by the pain, but still nervy, and trying desperately. He knew Dato Vatao would keep his word. Garcia walked, despite all he could do.

The Macabebes were shouting at the tops of their voices and dancing up and down. The Ilongots were squatting on their haunches, glowering. Dato Vatao, the old Moro chieftain, was cursing and waving his arms above his head as he stood just back of first base, dancing on first one foot and then the other. The second man up had knocked a home run.

The American tried to pull himself together, but the more he tried the weaker he became, and the dizzier. Great beads of cold sweat stood on his forehead. His teeth chattered.

"B'loon sup!" shrieked the Macabebes.

"B'loon sup!" came back the echo from the distant mountain walls that lifted themselves darkly, gruesome, forbidding. Spencer wondered if there might be any chance to escape through the crowd.

There was no use in trying any more, concluded the scout. It couldn't be done. And so—— He had been in tight places before. Possibly he might get out of this one as he had scores of others. He glanced at Dato Vatao.

"Wha's ma'r? Ho! T'row 'em arm out?" Dato Vatao had no other pitcher. If Spencer could not win, the game was gone. Dato Vatao ground his teeth.

"Wha's ma'r?" The old chief crossed the diamond to the pitcher's box. The umpire called time. Spencer stood dejected, apparently helpless, as pale as a ghost. He seemed to have lost his nerve—superb as it had been shown to be in a hundred desperate situations. Dato Vatao looked up

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at the big scout for a full minute. Then he burst out:

"You all-same clam! You all-same got no—what you call 'em?—backbone. Ho! *Cachila* make me seek. Ho!"

He spat contemptuously on the ground very close to one of Spencer's feet. He shook a fist under the scout's nose, and swore in every language he knew. He sniffed, and hopped about like a bantam rooster that had found a worm and was clucking to a flock of Buff Cochin hens.

The scout stood looking down at him, and then out over the sea of black, evil-visaged Malays surrounding the baseball diamond. The scout's eyes had grown dim; his lips quivered; he wabbled like a drunken man breathing hard, as does one who suffers acutely from sea-sickness. The pain in his head was almost unendurable.

"You great big, bonehead dub!" roared Dato Vatao, repeating the language of the fans in Manila. "You ossified hunk of Swiss cheese! Ho! You mak' my belly ache. Go crawl in hole and die!"

Spencer shot an angry glance at the little Moro and gritted his teeth. Into his eyes there came a dangerous glint. He clenched his fists, quivering, shaking.

"Who tol' you could play bas'ball? Ho! You b'long in bushes! Ho! You got yellow streak, big as that." The chief held his hands out, spread wide apart, and sneered. Again he spat betel-nut juice close to one of Spencer's feet.

"I—I——" Spencer began weakly.

"Ho! Now baba's gone cry! Gone slobber. Ho! Pore li'l baba!"

The crowd surged closer and closer, listening curiously to the dialogue in the strange tongue. Instinctively they sensed that something was radically wrong with the big *cachila* "chief" of the Ilongots. They came closer, closer. There was menace in their mien. There was murder looking out of the eyes of the hundreds of Ilongots. Spencer felt that the end was near, unless——

"Stand back there, you blankety-blanked lot of dirty sons of monkeys, yuh!" he shouted, and shook both his fists. "And you!" He faced Dato Vatao savagely. "Get off this diamond or I'll choke your life out and feed your carcass to the buzzards."

He rushed at the old chief, lowering his head, crouching as does a panther about to spring. But still his knees shook. He felt faint and dizzy. It was only a bluff. Dato Vatao knew it, and stood his ground.

"Ho! No can peetser, so talk much; no can peetser, so make noise wit' mouf! Ho!"

Spencer paused and stood mopping his forehead with his shirt sleeve.

"*Agua!*" he called in a half whisper, and reeled.

"*Tuba!*" shouted the Moro chieftain. "You no want water. Drink heap *tuba*. No? Get 'em brace up! No? Mebbe so; mebbe so!" Vatao seemed to have forgotten Spencer's injury.

A *muchacho* elbowed his way through the crowd of savages, carrying a gourd filled with *tuba*. Spencer emptied it at a gulp and threw the gourd after the native. Several of the Malays laughed. Spencer grasped one of them by the wrist and raised him off his feet at arm's length. Then he shook the hapless native as a dog would shake a rat, and tossed him to one side. He started again for Dato Vatao. That wily old scoundrel backed into the crowd, chuckling.

"Play ball!" bellowed the umpire at a nod from Vatao. The diamond was cleared. the Ilongots took their positions in the field. Spencer delivered the ball to the batter. It went sailing out over the field and far into the thicket beyond. The Macabebes screamed. The Ilongots groaned and threatened.

"Take him out!"

The visitors had "got next" to Spencer's straight balls. They would bat him all over the lot. They would make a score of tallies. They would win the game without so much as a struggle. Dato Vatao growled and hissed and chortled.

VATAO held up a skinny arm. The umpire called time. The old Malay motioned for the center fielder to come in. He was something of a pitcher, although he had very little speed when he threw curves. The chief sent the first baseman to center field and beckoned to Spencer to play first. The game proceeded. After the American's whirlwind delivery and puzzling cross-fire the slow curves were troublesome to the Macabebes. The next three men up struck out.

As each batter approached the plate, while the pitcher was serving up his assortment of curves in slow, easy fashion, Dato Vatao squatted behind Spencer, talking to him, abusing, mocking, taunting him.

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Little by little Spencer regained his mental equipoise as he became more and more angry. He almost forgot the pain in his head. He wished he might get his hands on the old Moro behind him. He gritted his teeth and stood, palms on his knees, watching the ball as it traveled back and forth between the pitcher and catcher.

After a while he laughed. It *was* a funny situation, after all, in which to find oneself. He turned on the old chief that slow, irresistible smile. The chief turned away his head, cursing him, but exulting inwardly.

The last man retired. The Ilongots went to bat. The first two men struck out. The next man got a hit. It was Spencer's time to bat. He faced the lanky pitcher with a savage scowl on his bronzed face, and gritted his teeth. Then he looked at Dato Vatao. The first ball went wide and the scout stood still.

"Strike!" announced the umpire.

One who has never seen a baseball game in the jungles may have the idea that it is a "snap" to umpire a game between two teams of simple-minded Malays.

"Kill the umpire!" howled the Ilongots. "Kill the umpire!"

The natives rushed for the diamond. Spencer leaped forward and waved his bat. The crowd fell back. The scout was determined to "swat that pill" or die right where he was. He could not understand the psychology of it, nor did he care to understand it; but the things Dato Vatao had said to him, the sneering of the old scoundrel, the abuse he had heaped upon the helpless *cachila* there, had stirred up a veritable devil in Spencer's heart. He was as cool as if he had just emerged from a shower bath and was being wrapped up in a sheet by a big Turk. The pain in his head had gone.

"Stand back there, or I'll brain yuh! D'yuh hear me?" He continued to wave the bat; the crowd fell back, muttering.

It was the first unsatisfactory decision of the game—and it would be the last. The umpire was a Macabebe. He looked at Spencer his gratitude. The American probably had saved his life.

The next ball broke high and whizzed very close to Spencer's shoulder, several inches inside the plate. The scout stood motionless. "Ball one," announced the umpire resolutely, and glanced about him.

"Him got 'em good eye," muttered Dato Vatao.

The pitcher wound up again and delivered the ball. It was a swift, straight ball. Spencer caught it on the end of his bat with a powerful swing. Some little Filipino boy in the next province probably has that ball to this day, as a souvenir of the occasion. Vatao sent the center fielder back to his position, shifted the first baseman, and sent Spencer into the box again.

"You braced up? Ho!"

Spencer said nothing. But he pitched as he never had pitched before in his life. During the remaining innings he struck out eight men. The Macabebes stood up in front of him but to be retired.

Finally came the last half of the ninth inning. The score still stood two to three. The first two Ilongots to bat were retired at first. The third man up hit a hot grounder past the short-stop. It was again Spencer's turn at bat. Choking his bat a good six inches from the end he leaned on the first ball pitched. It was another home run.

As he neared third base he glanced at the wildly gesticulating crowd of Ilongots along the foul line, half determined to make a break for the brush. Then he espied old Dato Vatao in the crowd. The chief had crossed from his place near first base.

"You braced up!" shouted the old man, and took hold of Spencer's arm. "You braced up plenty." Spencer trotted across the home plate with the winning run and sat down on a tuft of tonga grass near by.

"All same peetsers in Ermita," gurgled the Malay. "Lose 'em nerve. No can play ball. Ho! Boss he cuss 'em, scare 'em, talk heap mean to 'em—mebbe he brace up. Mebbe he play ball likell. Ho!"

"I'LL be a monkey-faced Gugu if I didn't almost lose my nerve for a while," Spencer muttered to himself as he struck off across a rice field down in the valley, several hours later, having been blindfolded and led down the hidden mountain trail by old Dato Vatao. A little farther on, having got his bearings and lit a cigarette, he laughed softly to himself and observed aloud:

"That old savage ought to go back to the States and manage a big-league team. He's the goods when he can make a man pitch a winning game when he's half dead with pain. By the Great Horn Spoon, he'd win a pennant every year!"

Perhaps he would. Who knows?

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TWO OF A KIND AND A PAIR

BEING A MISS DEMONSTRATOR STORY

by C. HILTON-TURVEY

"MISS DEMONSTRATOR" stood beside the electrician in the wings, watching him shift the lights on the stage from white to rose color, from rose color to green, by pulling down the handles on his switchboard.

"That's a good-lookin' bunch of ponies," she remarked approvingly, nodding toward the stage.

"Yep," he responded, "but did y' see the new one yet? She's the twinkle-twinkle of the whole lot."

Miss Demonstrator peeped around the edge of a painted tree.

"Second from the end," she observed. "Why, she's a regular little inkpot, Archie!"

"If you seen as many Sunshine Sallies as I do, from one year's end to the other," Archie returned, "you'd stare your eyes out when a Anthracite Floozy blowed into the show." Miss Demonstrator shrugged her shoulders and peeped out again.

The star of the show was singing a little by-by song. Behind her the chorus hummed and swayed sleepily, clad in pale blue pajamas, each one holding a property candle tipped with a tiny electric light. With the last phrase they trooped out, still singing.

Miss Demonstrator flattened herself against the wings, smiling into their faces as they came, and listening with one ear to the applause that followed them. The star danced through.

"On you go again!" the star called softly. Back they filed obediently.

Archie made a dive for his switchboard. Out went the lights. And in the dusk of the stage the twenty candles winked tremulously. One caught a hazy glimpse of graceful figures bending and swaying to the softly sung tune.

The star lingered on the last pianissimo note. There was a final flutter of tiny lights as the chorus danced off; the footlights flared up, the star bowed herself into the wings, the orchestra swung into a new rhythm; and the two comedians of the show ambled on in loud plaid clothes and wordy altercation, for this was a "bits and numbers" show, and variety was its long suit.

A good-looking young man strolled toward the place where Miss Demonstrator

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still lingered. He was in evening dress. His white gloves were tucked into his trouser pocket, the fingers protruding. Under his make-up his face showed strong and muscular, square-jawed and determined. He stepped in front of the vendor of toilet articles with a murmured apology, and thrust his pumps into the resin board—evidently his "bit" was dancing or an athletic stunt.

Miss Demonstrator glanced up into his face. "Hm! You're new, ain't you?"

"Not so very," he answered with a twinkle. "I'm going on twenty-five."

"A mere infant!" she commented. "I carry a special line of stuff that will interest you when you've time to look—rattles, teething rings, bibs——"

He threw back his handsome head with a laugh; then turned to her with a new interest. "I've heard a lot about you," he said. "You're Miss Dem, aren't you?"

"That's the device on my collar just now, but I was christened something else." She picked up her black bag from the floor as she spoke and made an impudent grimace at him.

"I want a ton or so of cold cream after the show," he said as she turned to go.

She nodded assent and made her way back to the dressing-rooms. In a long, narrow room about twenty chorus girls struggled with a change of costume for the next "number." The hooks that lined the walls bulged with clothes. High-heeled slippers lay on the floor, kicked into corners by the nimble feet that shed them. The girls were chattering like a forest full of magpies.

As Miss Demonstrator entered, a girl backed up to her. "Oh, Miss Dem, do hook me up!" she begged.

The little vendor slung her bag into a corner and got to work. For the next few minutes she buttoned, hooked, "whitewashed" slender backs, and made herself generally useful. She had many theaters in many towns on her business list, but the Folly Burlesque down at the "Troc"—short for Trocadero—was her particular stamping-ground when they were not on the road. And she knew and loved every one in the show, with one or two exceptions.

Out of the tail of her eye she watched the "little Inkpot" making bungling attempts to dress. It seemed to Miss Dem that she had never seen such a helpless girl in her life. At last she went over, grabbed hold of her with a jolly laugh, and began to hook her up, saying, "I guess they must have caught you up a tree in the woods, for all you know about putting your clothes on!"

The girl looked over her shoulder. Miss Demonstrator saw that her hazel eyes were full of tears.

"Oh!" she exclaimed in a distressed voice. "Isn't it dreadful to bring up a girl not to know how to dress? I'll never get the hang of it—never!"

Miss Dem looked keenly at her. She colored and bit her lips, as if she had said more than she had intended.

"The—the—stage dresses are—are different from one's own clothes," she finished lamely.

An impatient hand rapped on the door.

"All hands out for the next number!" the Manager called, and passed on.

The girls trooped out—all but the little Inkpot, who was searching frantically under the tables and chairs for something.

"What's missing?" asked Miss Dem.

"My slippers for this number," she answered. "White, with red heels." Then making a dash for the door: "I'll be late! I must wear these!"

Miss Dem took hold of her wrist and held her back. "And get a call-down from the Musical Director!" she said. "I'll help you find 'em!"

A moment more and she pulled the sought-for slippers from a hook on the wall, half hidden by a filmy skirt. She pushed the girl into a chair and helped her off with one pair and on with another. Then, taking her by the hand, she hurried her into the corridor and down the stairway into the wings. They were not a second too soon. Already the chorus were filing on to the stage. Breathlessly the newcomer followed, with a word of gratitude so fervent that it made Miss Dem smile.

The good-looking young fellow in a dress suit stood in the wings, fanning himself with his opera hat. Evidently his "bit" was just over. Two stage-hands were wheeling a punching-bag and stand off out of the way.

He smiled and nodded to Miss Dem.

"What's your name?" she asked him, adding as a mischievous afterthought, "That is, if you've been christened yet."

He grinned cheerfully, showing his even white teeth. "Here's my label!" he returned, pulling a rumpled program out of his

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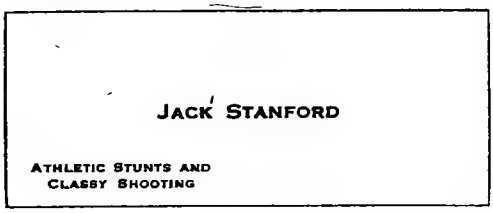
pocket and handing it to her. It was marked with a blue pencil. Miss Dem read:



"That looks like good money to me," she said, handing it back to him.

He flashed another smile at her.

"Pays for my toothpicks," he announced, taking a twirling step or two, as if he couldn't keep his feet still. The Manager's voice came faintly to them from back in the corridor, "All on for the last!"

THE whole company flocked to the wings—comedians, dainty soubrette, the heavy singing team, consisting of three men with really fine voices and the overplus of flesh that so often goes with it—all humming the tune the chorus was singing out on the stage, and keeping time with their feet in high good humor. The star elbowed her way through, whispering directions to the electrician as she went on.

In a few minutes the show was over for the afternoon, and Miss Dem got busy selling her wares. This, though the main object, was not the only one. Often she dropped in just for the pleasure of seeing her friends in the show; and many were the confidences poured into her sympathetic ear, the misunderstandings she cleared up, the fights she settled in her own sensible way. She had a special eye out for the "ponies," those slim youngsters who make up the first row of the chorus. Their hard knocks, their pleasures and their many temptations were of absorbing interest to her.

During the week that followed she was pleased to observe that the little Inkpot was making good with the show people. In fact, they made a regular baby of her. And what with the girls petting her and the men making love to her she was in a fair way to be spoiled. Only it didn't act that way. She blossomed out like a little rose in the sunshine. "Gladys St. Clair" was the high-flown name she had chosen. Behind the scenes they abbreviated it to "Glad"—and it just suited her, for she was never anything else.

But oh, she was the helpless child! Never seemed to know how to get into her duds—or out of them! And as for taking a stitch when anything went wrong—why, it was beyond her. So they all helped her; and even Archie, the electrician, had been known to sew on a hook and eye for "the Anthracite Floozy" when every one else was on the jump. In fact, they all made such wholesale love to little Glad that it came as a distinct surprise to Miss Dem to find out that one man in the show was specializing on the subject.

The beauty vendor kept open house in her cozy rooms on Saturday afternoons, and her friends from the Troc often dropped in after the afternoon performance for a cup of tea and a chat. On the Saturday the Folly Burlesques finished their engagement in town and were preparing to move on to another, Miss Dem opened her door to find Jack Stanford studying her visiting-card, pinned up over the bell. He was so absorbed that she caught him with a monocle to his eye. Hastily he put it away.

"Hm!" she observed teasingly. "I've thought all week you were a bloomin' Englishman; now I know it!"

He assumed an attitude of mock contrition that only partly hid his chagrin.

"So I am," he admitted, "but it isn't my fault. I flatter myself no one in the show even guesses it. You see, I'm a pretty slick mimic, and I've worked hard at the American accent. You won't tell?" he begged with a rueful grin.

Miss Dem threw the door wide open.

"Come on in," she said crisply, "and don't talk nonsense!"

He walked in, and seating himself on the couch in the little sitting-room, began to play with Miss Dem's villainous-looking bulldog, Angel-face. His hostess went into the other room to set the kettle boiling.

They kept conversation going as she moved about. But presently silence fell, and Miss Dem peeped in softly to see if Jack had fallen asleep—that sometimes happened with an actor after a hard week. But there he stood by the mantel, gazing at a little picture of Glad. His back was toward her, but she could see his face in the mirror, so tender and passionate that she hardly knew it.

Before she thought she called out in her brusk way, "Pretty good, ain't it?"

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Jack Stanford wheeled around, the picture still in his hand.

"Yes," he said quietly. "Pretty; and—good." He put the picture back in its place. "It couldn't be anything else," he added, almost in a whisper. And then he pulled himself together, and was his own debonair self, till it was time to go.

But in that minute Miss Dem had seen a glimpse of a dawning love that was big and still and strong. And it put to rest her anxiety about the all-too-pretty Glad, exposed to temptations of which her innocence never dreamed, both in and out of the show. Surely nothing could happen to the child with a love like that for a bulwark of defense.

A few minutes after Jack left, Glad came racing up the stairs. She was full of the kindness of the show people to her.

"Oh, Miss Dem!" she cried. "I love them all—they're real people! I never knew any but 'pretend' people before I came into the show." Glad looked charming as she sat there perched on the couch, her face flushed with feeling, her eyes shining under the dark hair, filleted down almost to the delicate line of her eyebrows—an exquisitely beautiful girl with a touch of something at once piquant and mysterious about her.

For the second time that day impulse caught Miss Dem unaware, and she found herself saying:

"Say! What's your name, kidlet? Not your stage name, but your real one."

To her surprise the girl shook her head.

"I mustn't tell you!" she murmured in a low tone. "I don't want to get you into trouble."

"Get—me—into—trouble!" Miss Dem repeated, puzzled. "What do you mean?"

Glad bit her lip; then suddenly threw back her head and laughed. "Oh, don't pay any attention to me!" she bade Miss Dem. "I'm just gassing! I've got such an ugly name that I'm ashamed to tell it. Don't you like my stage name?"

"Yes," the hostess answered slowly. "Gladys St. Clair is as fancy as they come. But somehow it doesn't suit you any better than your black hair suits that fair white skin of yours."

The girl flushed and bent over the dog at her feet.

"No, sir!" she said. "No more cake for doggies!" After a moment she arose and, giving Miss Dem a hearty hug, announced that it was time for her to be going along.

But the lively little vendor of toilet articles pondered till the cup of tea she held grew cold, trying to put certain incongruous things together and make them harmonize with her concept of Glad—certain vague things half remembered in the one short week she had known the girl. But it was no use. So finally she got up; and, having poured the frigid tea down the washbowl, made herself some more.

She was at the station the next morning to see them off, and to fill a few belated orders for toilet articles.

They stood there on the station platform in the frosty morning air, as gay a crowd as if there were no such things as interrupted slumbers, hasty breakfasts, and all the minor inconveniences that attend an early flitting. They joked and laughed and did fancy steps to warm themselves. For such is the temperament of the stage folk.

Miss Dem looked in vain for Glad. It was not till an official had intoned the announcement of, "Special car for the Folly Burlesque!" that Glad came running down the platform, with Jack Stanford striding beside her, carrying a suitcase and Glad's raincoat and umbrella.

There was very little time now for farewells or for the word of advice Miss Dem had intended to give the new recruit. So she contented herself with whispering to Glad, "Don't go anywhere alone, kidlet—take one of the show people with you."

And Glad nodded and dimpled, hardly hearing what Miss Dem was saying in the excitement of the moment.

"Oh, Miss Dem!" she bubbled merrily. "I couldn't get dressed this morning—that's why I'm late. My dress is open all the way under my coat! Isn't that a way to travel!"

She hopped up on the step and stood there while Jack said good-by to Miss Dem.

"Wish us luck, Miss Dem!" he called gaily as the train began to move off.

She ran beside the steps, looking smilingly up into his handsome face.

"Take care of her, Jack!" she said. "She's nothing but a baby!"

The rumble of the train drowned his reply, but there was something in the expression of his steady gray eyes that reassured Miss Dem and set her mind at ease.

They were gone down the shining track, leaving a feather of black smoke trailing

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behind them. Miss Demonstrator turned and walked soberly away.

IT WAS late in May when she saw them again. They came to town on a return engagement, as jolly a crowd as had left it that Winter day. Miss Demonstrator was pleased to note that both Glad and Jack were still prime favorites with the company. The star characterized the latter as "a dear boy."

"There's nothing uppish about him," she observed warmly. "At one of our towns we struck a theater that must have been used for a pigpen. You ought to have seen the place! We were late getting there—a freight wreck ahead of us—and had just time to get a sandwich and rush to the performance.

"Well, Jack had to get there early to see after something that had gone wrong with his punching-bag; he took one look 'round my cubby hole, and then, instead of getting his supper, he hunted up a broom and a swab—there wasn't a woman about the place to help him!—and he got to work and had the place fairly decent when I got there."

"That was like him!" remarked Miss Dem approvingly.

"Wasn't it?" the star concurred. "And he even managed to slick up the place where the girls dressed. And when I thanked him after the show, he made up some absurd paragraph he pretended he was going to publish in the *Clipper* about Miss Velmar taking along a squad of 'whitewings' to make a clean-up for her show—and a lot of such stuff! And he didn't admit from first to last that he had done anything out of the common."

"I liked him the first minute I shifted my goggles on him," averred Miss Dem, glad to have her judgment confirmed.

Now, there was a cheerful restaurant where the company often went after the night show. Sometimes Miss Dem joined them and sat laughing and talking over a glass of beer and a sandwich.

One night in midweek she drew a chair beside Glad where she sat at a table with some of the show people. Glad had a huge glass of milk before her, which she was sipping with the enjoyment of a child. She had never been able to partake of even the mild intoxicants in which the other ponies indulged.

"How's the infant?" Miss Dem asked affectionately.

Glad leaned over and whispered.

"I'm nervous," she said. "There's that horrid man staring at me again!"

Now, for several days Glad had complained that a man, sitting generally in the front row, had stared persistently at her, and that twice he had followed her on the street. Strange to say, he had not attempted to speak to her.

Miss Dem glanced across the restaurant. From where she sat she got a good look at the man. There was something sinister in his regard of the little show girl. He appeared to be listening to the scraps of conversation flung from one table to another, as if he expected to hear something of interest to him.

Miss Demonstrator had made light of Glad's tremors. Now she began to feel a little anxious. She determined to safeguard the child in every possible way; so when she arose to go she bent over Jack's chair and said in a low tone—

"Don't let Glad out of your sight till she's safe home—don't let any one else take her." He looked puzzled, and she added whimsically, "There's a reason!"

He nodded. And when Miss Dem looked back from the doorway she was pleased to see that Jack had slipped into her seat beside Glad, and taken evident charge of her.

So the toilet vendor went home with a contented mind and, having fed Angel-face, got into a kimono and prepared to read herself to sleep. She had almost succeeded—for her mental motor was beginning to "miss," and the sentences ran together—when there was a ring at the door.

Pushing Angel-face off the edge of her kimono, she went to the door and opened it a crack.

There, to her surprise, stood Jack Stanford and Glad, hand in hand like a couple of kids.

The moment she saw their faces she knew something out of the common had happened. She swung the door wide open.

"For the land's sake!" she exclaimed. "Come in and tell me the news!"

Jack made no answer till he had closed the door, locking it after him, and sliding the brass bolt, which Miss Dem hardly ever thought of using.

"Expectin' one of your burglar friends to call?" she asked pleasantly.

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"I wouldn't like to say," Jack returned easily, "but I intend to be on the safe side if they do."

He crossed over to where Glad sat perched on the arm of a chair, like a shy little bird ready to fly away. He put his arm over her slim shoulders in a manner at once protecting and tender.

"Miss Dem," he announced, and happiness bubbled up in his voice like a spring in the sunshine, "Miss Dem, this little girl has promised to marry me!"

"The deuce she has!" exclaimed Miss Dem, with more force than elegance. And forthwith she embraced them both impartially, while Angel-face barked about them, thinking it a new kind of game for his special benefit.

They sat down and talked the matter over.

Presently the clock struck twelve.

Jack started up.

"It's a shame to keep you out of your bed!" he said penitently. "But now for the other matter. I've a great favor to ask of you."

"Spit it out!" commanded Miss Dem heartily.

The young man came close to her and spoke in a low tone.

"That man followed us here," he said.

"The one that's been rubberin' at Glad?"

Jack nodded gravely.

"It's more than the usual masher racket," he went on, "and I wondered if you would think it too much of an imposition if I asked you to keep Glad——"

"Here all night," Miss Dem finished for him. "Why, to be sure! And pleased with the chancet."

Jack made her a grave bow of thanks.

"I don't know what his game is," he said, "but I intend to find out before long. Meanwhile I'll feel safer if my little girl is with you. She should have told me about him before; but I'll soon get hold of him and knock his block off!" he finished grimly.

"Then shoo!" commanded Miss Dem, waving him to the door. "Glad must get a good night's sleep before rehearsing that extra stunt tomorrow morning."

Then, tactfully remembering something in the next room that must be done at once, she left them alone to say good night.

When she returned a few moments later they were still prolonging the blissful process.

"Well, I never!" she exclaimed; and grabbing Jack's arm she relentlessly pushed him to the door and shut and locked it after him.

Jack laughed. He liked Miss Dem's impudence. He stooped and called softly through the keyhole:

"I say, Miss Dem! I told Glad I'm a bloomin' Henglishman, and she doesn't mind a bit!"

"I should say not!" Glad said warmly. "I'd marry Jack Stanford if he were the ashman!"

She made this remark in so fervent a tone that Jack, outside, rattled the door knob and begged to come in for another good night.

This Miss Dem firmly refused. But she promised that he should be allowed to call in the morning and take Glad to the rehearsal. And with this golden concession he went downstairs three at a time—the happiest man in ten States.

Meantime Glad got into a borrowed nightie, and told Miss Dem "all about it"—and a sweet little love story it was.

As they sat on the side of the bed, with Angel-face between them, Miss Dem remarked musingly:

"I'd like to know why that sneak-about in the front seat camps out on your track. I hope Jack will smoke his lamps for him!"

Glad shook her head.

"I'm afraid that won't squench him," she said dubiously. Then suddenly she caught Miss Dem's hand in both her own. "Oh, Miss Dem!" she exclaimed breathlessly, "I've got to tell somebody. He's a detective, and he's after me!"

"*What!*" If Angel-face had miaowed, Miss Dem could not have been more surprised. "A gumshoe! After you?"

"Yes," Glad returned sadly.

"What you been doin'?" Miss Dem demanded, scandalized. "Yeggin' a post-office or black-jackin' a policeman?"

Glad hung her pretty head.

"No," she murmured in some confusion, "but something almost as bad. I—I ran away from home."

"Hm!" said Miss Dem. "And you need to tell some one about it, eh?" She got up, took the down comfortable from the foot of the bed, and put it around the young girl's shoulders, fastening it with an able-bodied safety pin.

"Now," she commanded, reaching for a

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pillow to put at Glad's back, "if you've really come to a point where you'd like to take some one into your confidence, let's have the story of your life—the night's young!"

GLAD was silent a few moments, meditating how to begin. Angelface snuggled his muzzle into her hand, whimpering with affection. She bent down and bestowed a fleeting caress on his ugly face, then threw back her head as one who resolved to plunge—come what may.

"Miss Dem," she began, "did you ever hear of Abner S. Trent?"

"Was I born yesterday?" asked Miss Dem with good-humored sarcasm. "Or can't I read the newspapers? Doesn't everybody know Trent, the choo-choo magnate? Why," she added, "I ride on his railroad a hundred times a year."

"He's—my—father," Glad announced, taking the plunge and finding it cold.

"Your what?" Miss Dem sat up straight and gasped.

Glad nodded.

"Yes—I'm his only daughter, Dolores."

Miss Dem's mind flashed swiftly to the first time she had met the girl.

"That's why you didn't know how to put on your own clothes, you poor little thing! Isn't it?" she demanded inconsequently.

Glad made a gesture of distaste.

"Miss Dem," she burst out, "I've been maided to death all my life. I've never done a thing for myself; I've never been alone a moment; I've never been allowed to think for myself, till I stole the right by running away! Mama died when I was born, and papa has had me brought up for one thing and one only—to marry a title and let him live in the blaze of it!" she finished passionately.

"Bless my soul!" murmured Miss Dem.

"Do you want to hear any more?" the girl asked wistfully.

"Do I want to hear any more?" Miss Dem repeated with mock ferocity. "If you stop I'll set the dorg on you! I never seen anything as romantic as this outside my favorite dime novel," she added with a grin.

"So," Glad went on reflectively, "when I found that papa was going to take me to Paris this Winter, I knew it meant that awful Count de Lupin. And I simply had to make a break. Papa has a dreadfully strong will and he'd make me marry any one he wanted."

Glad cuddled into the comfortable and clasped her hands around her knees.

"Miss Dem," she asked dreamily, "do you believe in angels?"

"I pass!" said Miss Dem promptly.

"Well, once long ago, the mother of my governess came to spend the day with her. Oh, she was such a sweet, faded old lady, and money didn't make the least bit of difference to her. I think now that my governess must have told her what papa intended for me—a titled match; for when my governess went out of the room for a few minutes, the dear old lady stopped in the middle of a fairy story she was telling me, and switched off to a story about a young girl friend of hers, who had married a French prince or a marquis or something.

"And he was very dreadful—he had palsy and had to be wheeled 'round in a chair. And the young girl wrote to her friend, the old lady, and told her how the man used to sit and shake and gloat on her with his little red-rimmed eyes, till she felt like a fly in a spider's web. And after she had stood it for two years she couldn't stand it any longer, and so one day she drowned herself in the moat of his castle and got away from him for good."

"Oh!" ejaculated Miss Dem under her breath.

"And the old lady told me that love was the only excuse for getting married, and that no matter how people tried to persuade me I must never marry a man I didn't love with all my heart. And when my governess came back into the room again she must have heard what her mother said, for she scolded her and told her she mustn't put such ideas into my head."

"Hm!" observed Miss Dem. "That was sure some governess!"

Glad shrugged her shoulders.

"That's what she was paid for—to forward papa's plans. Papa was very strict." Glad sighed. "I never saw the dear old lady again, but I've often thought that she was an angel—or just as good as one—sent to warn me not to marry a bad man."

"What I can't understand," remarked Miss Dem, "is why they didn't advertise and find you at once."

Glad's lip curled.

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"Because," she said scornfully, "if it were known that I had run away, it would hurt my market value—papa's money wouldn't buy such a high title."

Miss Dem stared. Was this young cynic the infant of the show?

Glad smiled at her expression.

"Up at one of our country places," she continued, "they fatten chickens and things by cooping them up a while before they kill them. That is the way they did with me—only they cooped me up all my life. Now it was the time for the sacrifice. I had a terrible time to get away. And oh, Miss Dem! The first time I dressed myself! And the first time I fixed my hair!"

She laughed gleefully at the remembrance.

"So I had it cut off, and—just look away a minute, Demmy, dear!" she commanded.

Miss Dem closed her eyes obediently. When she opened them, there sat Glad, smiling a trifle embarrassedly—her head crowned with short, rough curls of pale gold, and a raven wig in her lap.

Miss Dem's jaw dropped.

"You little sinner!" she exclaimed. "Does Jack know?"

Glad drooped. She fingered at the black wig.

"No—he—doesn't know anything about me—except that I'm going to marry him. Do you think he'll—he'll—mind?"

"No," responded Miss Dem stoutly, remembering the look on Jack's face the Sunday before they left. "You may bet on Jack Stanford to stick to you, even if you had green hair—or purple hair—or plaid hair!"

Glad smiled shyly. Love was still exquisitely new to her.

"I hope he won't mind the money," she mused under her breath. Then aloud, "Wouldn't it be dreadful to be married for your money, Dem?"

"I don't know," replied Miss Dem reflectively. "I've never had any one try it on me." She reached over and dumped Angel-face off the bed. "Come! We must get to sleep. In with you! And don't forget to say your prayers!"

"But," Glad protested, "you haven't told me what I'd better do—about the detective. My dark wig puzzles him, I fancy, but I think he begins to guess; and when he does he'll wire papa, and it will be all up with me!"

The tears welled up into her pretty eyes.

Miss Dem patted her cheek.

"Go to sleep now," she bade her, "and I'll tell you in the morning."

And long after Glad slept, curled up like a drowsy baby, the light from the street shining on her golden head, Miss Dem lay staring at the dim wall opposite, wondering how best to save the young girl from the fate she dreaded. It was a sure thing that Abner Trent would not countenance the marriage of his daughter to an actor in burlesque, no matter how fine a fellow he might be. It was equally certain, in Miss Dem's mind, that the love of a man like Stanford was a pearl of great price—worth a barrel full of titles, coronets, and castles to boot.

Evidently Mr. Gumshoe wasn't quite sure of his quarry—a wig makes a big difference—but at any moment he might decide to wire Abner Trent that his daughter was a show girl at the Troc. Then indeed it would be all up with Glad and Jack. The old lady's story came shudderingly into her mind.

That clinched the matter. There was only one thing to be done.

And having decided just what that one thing was, Miss Dem turned over and went to sleep.

The sun was up, and then some, when Miss Dem awoke. She rose on her elbow and looked long on the face of the sleeping girl beside her. Perhaps—who knows?—she said a little prayer softly in her heart. Flippant Miss Dem had a deeper aspect than most people suspected. While she gazed, Glad stirred. The bright hazel eyes opened, then closed drowsily again.

"Come!" Miss Dem sang out cheerily. "Get up and begin the day! You're going to be married before it ends!"

Glad sat bolt up, gasping with the announcement.

"What are you talking about?" she asked, amazed.

Miss Dem explained at length.

"Once you get into the shadow of your father's devilish money—and may the gods forgive me for talkin' so of good hard cash!—it'll grab you tighter than ever. You won't get away again! We can't delay. You and Jack must be married this evening at the latest."

"But I really couldn't——"

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"Oh, then you don't love Jack after all——"

"I do!"

"Remember your French count, and the girl who drowned herself to get away from another just like him—I *suppose* the one your dad has in mind is the living twin to him," said Miss Dem dryly.

"Oh——"

Glad twisted her fingers in her lap.

Her friend saw that her last argument had gone home. But it was a very tremulous young girl who, protesting and saying that it would never do, finally yielded on condition that Jack agreed willingly—"very, very willingly, Miss Dem!"—to such a hasty wedding.

Miss Dem laughed heartily at the proviso. She was sure of Jack Stanford!

Breakfast was hardly over when he appeared, so joyous, so wide awake and alert, that no one would have suspected that he had spent the night walking up and down the pavement opposite their door as an additional safeguard for his sweetheart—nor, as a matter of fact, did he enlighten them.

It was now or never for the great plan.

MISS DEM took a deep breath and told Jack just what she thought best to be done, and particularly dwelt on the necessity for haste, while Glad blushed rose-red in a far corner of the room, perilously near tears.

As for Jack, he got as pale as death, with the tremendous feeling that only a strong nature knows. Without a word he walked over to Glad, took her cold little hands in his, put them around his neck and kissed her gravely.

"Shall it be today, little sweetness?" he asked softly.

And Glad in answer said the funniest thing, probably, that any girl ever did say under the circumstances.

"Oh, Jack!" she murmured in a small, embarrassed voice. "My hair isn't m-my own. It's—it's—a wig."

And with that she pulled it off and stood bashfully before him, her pale golden locks rumpled all over her head, her cheeks scarlet, and her troubled brown eyes looking straight into his—waiting to read there his verdict upon her duplicity.

Jack started back in utter amazement; he stared and stared as if he could not believe his eyes. To court a dark little elf for months and then in a flash have her turn into a golden moonbeam under one's very eyes was disconcerting, to say the least. As a matter of fact, Jack thought he had never known before how wonderfully, exquisitely lovely she was. But he was so floored at the lightning change that it did not occur to him to tell her so. And Glad misconstrued his silence into disapproval.

Her head drooped. Two round tears welled out of her eyes and splashed their way down her cheeks.

Then Jack did the best thing possible. He took her into his arms—not as if she were his affianced wife, but as if she were a little child to be comforted.

"Why, you darling!" he said tenderly. "And did you think it mattered in the least?"

And Miss Dem, listening unwillingly in the doorway, thought it augured well for Glad's future happiness that Jack never once asked the why and wherefore of the dark tresses she had worn ever since he had known her, but left her to tell him of her own accord at some serener moment.

Then they all three sat down and talked things over from every point of view.

Miss Dem had promised Glad that Jack should not know of her wealth, nor her father's name or position. "Not for my own sake," Glad had declared proudly, "but so that I can prove to papa that Jack did not marry me for my money."

It was a foregone conclusion that Trent would disinherit his daughter if she married without his consent, but Glad would still have a comfortable fortune from her mother's estate when she came of age. And it was of a size to attract a fortune hunter, too.

So Miss Dem felt her way cautiously, and told only so much of Glad's story as the girl wished Jack to know before their marriage. Briefly it was this: Glad had run away from home because her father had wanted to marry her to a man she hated. And after months of security under an assumed name and a raven wig, she was about to be discovered by the man, who had followed and watched her.

Jack was relieved to hear this explanation of the "villain" who had harried his sweetheart, but he agreed that the case was serious. In fact, he was for marrying Glad that very morning, fearful that she would be spirited away from under his eyes.

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Miss Dem, however, persuaded him to wait till evening.

"You get the license, Jack," she bade him, "and after rehearsal Glad and I will mosey 'round in a shop or two. If Glad is to be married, she must dress the part in a flossy white gown and a frosty little veil."

Of course the young man protested. What did he care what Glad wore, anyhow? He wasn't marrying a fashion dummy.

But Miss Dem stood firm. "No use talkin'!" she said. "Glad must be married right or not at all."

And so it happened that after the show that evening the company were asked to remain a few moments. And while they waited, a golden-haired girl who looked oddly like Glad—a slender little figure in a shimmering white gown with a switch of a train to it, and a misty veil that made her look like a nymph in a fountain—walked sedately on the stage from the right wing, leaning on the Manager's arm, and met Jack Stanford emerging from the left. The latter was accompanied by a serious gentleman in black, with a vest that buttoned up to his chin, and a little book in his hand.

Then with a gasp of astonishment the Folly Burlesque understood. But not till afterward did they know why the affair had been kept so secret till the last minute, lest any careless tongue should let it leak out to the public.

The clergyman stood silent a moment, his book at the proper leaf. He had married people in some strange places, but none stranger than this. He glanced around at the groups nearest him—girls in tights, comedians in comic wigs and noisy striped suits, the red of their make-up staining the edge of their collars and cuffs; the star of the show in a brilliant Parisian costume consisting almost entirely of glass beads, through which one could see her silk-stockinged legs as she moved.

It was all glamour wrong side out—mouths painted in a continuous simper, eyebrows blackened till they looked like dark streaked clouds on the vivid sunset of their cheeks. It was all grotesque, artificial. And yet, as the clergyman looked out over the empty theater, he felt the reverence of these stage folks—their warm sympathy for the human side of the ceremony. It was life—love, virile and strong—that made a temple of this dingy place with its staring lights and the crimson of its empty seats.

So he began—

"Dearly beloved, we are gathered together——" and proceeded without looking at his book, for he knew the service.

After his rather monotonous voice Jack's responses, joyous and vital, rang out like a clarion at dawn—

"I, John, take thee, Gladys, to be my wedded wife——"

And after that, the tremulous echo to the ministerial charge—

"I, Gladys, take thee, John——"

It sounded like a silver lute touched by a bird-wing in flight.

There was a stir at the door at the end of the aisle. The voice of the box-office man in angry altercation—a furious rejoinder—the tinkling descent of shattered glass to a marble floor—a noise of combat!

The minister's voice lapsed into silence for one pregnant moment. Then came a sentence that ended all, with the thrill of a tensely snapped whip—

"I pronounce you man and wife!"

At the same moment two men hurried up the aisle—one an elderly man in supreme agitation, the other the furtive fellow who had shadowed Glad, his coat nearly torn from his back, his collar wrenched from its button and sprawling out like a feather.

They leaped on the stage.

The elderly man peered about him like a ferret.

"Dolores!" he cried in a loud voice, and waited in silence a long second. Then suddenly he saw the clergyman, the stage people, reverent and subdued, the little bride in her frosty draperies, the young man standing hand in hand with her.

He flung himself toward them.

"Dolores!" he cried again. And in the tone was the disappointment of a lifetime—rage unspeakable—despair.

The new-made wife stood in the shelter of her husband's arms, mute and terror-stricken. The company huddled together in startled groups.

The Manager strode authoritatively toward the raging man.

"Come, come!" he cried. "This won't do. Out you go!" He seized him by the shoulder and pushed him toward the edge of the stage.

The man resisted furiously.

The detective caught hold of the Manager's arm. "Let go!" he bawled. "You don't know who this is!"

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"Nor care!" retorted the Manager angrily, shaking him off. "He's butting in where he doesn't belong!"

AT THIS juncture the elderly man wrenched himself free. "I am Abner S. Trent!" he panted. "And that girl—" he pointed a shaking finger at the shrinking little bride—"is my daughter Dolores!"

"What!" the Manager stammered. His hands fell to his sides. "I had no idea that she——"

"Oh! You had no idea," interrupted the other with a sneer, "that she was old Trent's daughter. Especially—" he made Jack a satirical bow— "this schemer!"

Jack Stanford gave his trembling wife over into Miss Dem's arms. He duplicated the bow of the enraged millionaire.

"You are correct in your supposition, sir. I knew nothing of my wife's parentage till this moment."

"You lie!" Trent bellowed.

"That is for you to prove, sir," Jack returned serenely.

"You —— adventurer! I *will* prove it!" He rushed up to the young man, his fat hands shutting and opening as if he would spring at him and throttle him, his eyes glaring. The detective whispered something in his ear. Trent pushed him away.

"Dolores, come here!" he commanded.

Glad took tight hold of Miss Dem's hand and came timidly forward, as white as her dress. The change in the young girl's demeanor was sadly significant. She drooped—she seemed oppressed, dominated, enslaved by the angry man before her. She was no more the laughing, high-spirited Glad whom the Folly Burlesque knew and loved—she was Dolores, the sorrowful. Miss Dem's arm was around her as they stood. She could feel the slender body quivering with fear, like an animal before its tormentor.

"So!" said Trent contemptuously. "You ran away from home to associate with people like these!" He indicated the company with a gesture of disgust. "To make yourself so cheap and common that no decent man would marry you—to say nothing of other plans!"

"I beg you to remember, sir," Jack interrupted sternly, stepping between them, "that you are speaking to my wife."

"Your wife!" the millionaire echoed. "And who is your wife, that any one should speak of her one way or another?"

Jack Stanford went pale, as if indignation burned his body to a white heat. He strode toward Trent and towered over the fat, vulgar figure a moment, as if he would annihilate him. Then suddenly, like one in battle who finds an overwhelming weapon ready to his hand, he was as cool as a man discussing the weather.

"Who is my wife?" he repeated, and his white teeth flashed in a debonair smile. He reached out his hand and drew Glad toward him. "Let me," he said formally, "present you to her Grace, the Duchess of Stanford and Marlowe."

Trent gasped. What audacity! This upstart actor trifling with Abner S. Trent! It was not to be thought of!

"Indeed!" he snorted sarcastically. "And who are you? The President of the United States, I suppose!"

"That ought not to be hard to guess, sir," Jack replied lightly. "I am the Duke of Stanford and Marlowe."

Trent gasped again.

"See here," he began pompously—and stopped. Something in the young man's bearing—his voice, the grave expression of his face, struck Trent. "But—but—," he blustered, "that's all you know about it. The young Duke of Stanford is hunting lions in Africa. Any newspaper could tell you that!"

"Is supposed to be hunting lions in Africa," Jack corrected him, in a gentle tone. "Really he is here, with his friends who care for him—not for his trumpery title!" He choked a little, then went on.

"You, sir," bowing to the multimillionaire, "you and my father, the late Duke, were two of a kind. You believed that life holds nothing higher than the exchange of one sordid thing for another—concretely speaking, money for a title—a title for money. And in accordance with the belief, my father planned an international marriage for me with any heiress who had the required millions.

"I refused. Money for titles—titles for money—" he shrugged his shoulders—"doesn't appeal to me. And in the last few minutes, I am overjoyed to know that my wife and I—the pair of us—are agreed in that matter. The most wonderful exchange in the world—" he stooped and kissed Glad fervently before them all—"is love for love!"

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A BLAMED AMATEUR

A STORY OF THE PRIZE RING

by GORDON McCREAGH

MR. WILLIAM C. VAN NEST, Senior, sat at his library table, considerably disgruntled, but dignified and more immutable than granite. His jaw was set as hard as a plaster mold, and his eyes were gray with cold determination. William C. Van Nest, Junior, sat opposite him, likewise disgruntled and hard set, but not dignified.

William C., Junior, had the same rough-hewn face as his father, but the older man's cool, calculating determination was in his case softened down by the impetuosity of youth. William C., Junior, was speaking impetuously now.

"I tell you, father, you don't understand," he was declaiming impassionedly. "You look at the whole thing from a biased standpoint. I know well enough that there is a prejudice against stage girls; but you can't let your darned prejudices overbalance justice. They aren't all alike."

The older man smiled somewhat grimly.

"They never are, my boy. I know nothing at all about this Miss La Rue, for or against; but I do know that there is a vast gulf between you and her in education, and upbringing, and mentality—in fact, everything necessary to happiness; to say nothing of social position. I'm speaking from the standpoint of experience, which at your age one never respects."

"But, father," broke in the other, "I keep telling you she meets all your objections. She's the most refined and——"

"Yes, yes, my boy; I know all that. I know that you know much more about it all than I do; but I know also that you do owe something to your family name; and while you're in this state it's up to me to protect that name. I am never going to give my consent to any such foolishness; and if you insist, I tell you that you won't have me to look to for any assistance."

William C., Junior, knew that this was final. He knew his father. In fact, he had known that this answer was inevitable an hour ago, when the interview started; and it was only his infatuated yearning that had kept him arguing so long. Fiery speech rose to his lips, but he controlled himself with something of an effort and arose formally.

"Well, since you are determined, dad, I suppose it's up to me to go out and find a position to enable me to support my wife."

"Your wife?" There was sudden alarm in the older man's tone.

"Well, not yet; but as soon as I can get something to do."

Old man Van Nest relaxed with heartfelt relief; but there was still a hint of anxiety in his voice. He knew his son.

"I'm sorry you should feel that way about it, my boy; but I've got to look out for you when you can't look out for yourself. So I suppose it's good-by—for the present. Remember, I'll be glad to see you when you can come back; though I know it will take some big disillusionment to bring you back."

The undutiful son was already at the door. "Good-by, father," he said shortly, with a hint of dramatic emotion—perhaps melodramatic.

"Good-by, my boy," returned the stern parent. "And say!" he called through the

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nearly closed door. "Tell her what I said about assistance from me."

He smiled shrewdly, and then somewhat sadly. He was not altogether sorry to see so much determination in the boy; but he still felt rather nervous about the outcome. His son was all he had; and they had been real companions. Then the shrewd smile came slowly back; and—

"That'll fix her, if I don't miss my guess," he muttered, and he took up the telephone receiver and called up a certain unobtrusive gentleman with observant eyes who had an office downtown.

William, Junior, went out into a cold and unsympathetic world. A thin sleet was driving through the streets and dissolving into slush under foot. Ten minutes of tramping through this weather was sufficient to make him see himself as the complete hero in melodramas, turned out of a sumptuous home into the Winter world of struggle. He was not without money, but even a fat bill-fold was a far cry from securing employment by which he could support a smart actress who was notoriously fond of nice (and expensive) things.

None of his father's friends would help him and offend the old magnate; he was quite certain of that. He glared at the people hurrying by with their coat collars up about their ears, and his mind began to burn with a fierce indignation against the injustice of his parent against the dearest, sweetest, best, etc., etc., in the world.

Now, there was more or less excuse for William C., Junior. He was far too well trained a college favorite not to follow precedent; and of course all precedent demanded that thwarted affection should express itself with fiery melodrama. And he was very young. He had left Yale only the previous June, after acquiring many columns in all the sporting-pages as a surpassing athlete, but very little philosophy of life.

As he splashed along with a duodecimo edition of smoldering Vesuvius in his heart, his eye was caught by a blaze of lights. He was approaching the Prospect Athletic Club. Good! He was in the mood to witness strong men battling. He went in and purchased a ring seat. He had always sat in a ring seat before, often in company with his father, who was a keen follower of sport; and it never occurred to him to husband his resources.

THE preliminary events were the usual affairs in such clubs—three- and four-round bouts between ambitious youngsters with all the grit in the world, but whose skill was in the inverse ratio to their willingness. There followed a ten-round event between a pair of undertrained gladiators who had "arrived," and therefore did not exert themselves more than was reasonably necessary.

William C. watched at first with the tingling thrill of the athlete who knows the intricacies of the game sufficiently to appreciate every good point made, and later with disgust at the effortless evolutions of the main eventers. He was about to leave, when a name held his attention. The brass-throated announcer proclaimed that the final event would be a slight change from the usual program; and amid a bedlam of howls, meant for applause, Willie McRivers, a rising Harlem favorite, whose manager wrote to the papers every day challenging indiscriminately all champions and would-be champions, climbed through the ropes.

He boxed a swift three-round exhibition with a willing sparring-partner, and Van Nest watched with awakened interest; but he thought the aspirant was much overrated, and fancied he could detect distinct weakness in his defense. He was still reviewing the performance in his mind, when the bell-mouthed Boanerges announced that "the coming champeen made his customary offer of FIFTY DOLLARS—"as if it were a thousand—"to any lad who could stay four rounds with him at one hundred and fifty-eight pounds."

This heroic version of "Dilly, dilly, come and be killed," was received in expectant silence. The "champeen's" manager grinned appreciatively and smote him on the back, as if to signify that silence inferred a wholesome respect for his *protégé;* and a confused shuffling and trampling announced that the show was at an end, when:

"Wait a minute. I'll take that." Van Nest found himself, rather to his own bewilderment, leaning against the ropes and addressing him of the leather lungs.

Impulsive youth again. Van Nest was surprised at himself; but at Yale the boxing-instructor had considered him his star pupil, and he had spent the past Summer and Autumn week-ends in strenuous rowing and swimming. He felt fit as a young buck,

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and his present mood was just mad enough to feel the old primitive instinct that finds relief in physical violence.

His announcement was received first with amazed silence, then with howls of delight.

Not that these offers were never taken up; but the rash taker was usually some optimistic and needy youth from the gallery, who was not averse to receiving a beating in return for the five or ten dollars that the management would hand him as a recompense for his efforts. That a ringsider should step up to the slaughter was an unprecedented cause of rejoicing.

Van Nest was whisked away to a dressing-room and hustled into a not over-clean "fighting-kit" with a celerity betokening anxiety lest he might have a lucid interval and change his mind; and before he was well aware of it, he found himself within the ropes with two husky strangers appointed to him as seconds.

"Ever fought 'n a ring before?" inquired one of his mentors, a battered veteran with an abnormal protuberance in place of his left ear, and but three visible teeth.

Van Nest shook his head.

The three teeth displayed themselves with jagged cheerfulness. "Well, youse is in fer a beltin' all right, all right, sonny; but it's up ter me ter see that they don't put nuttin' over on youse." With which comforting assurance the grizzled old timer proceeded methodically to inspect the two palm-leaf fans to see that no snuff had been dusted into the crevices, and critically tasted the rim of the water bottle.

Meanwhile the gentleman with the leather lungs, who also acted as referee, had raised his hand to still the pandemonium of whoops and catcalls from the gallery, and was proclaiming that "the coming champeen would now fight four rounds with——" He looked inquiringly at Van Nest.

"Smith," said the latter.

"With Mr. Smith of this city, who scales one hundred and fifty-six pounds."

Mr. Smith was wondering how the confident gentleman had guessed his weight so nearly without the preliminary formality of weighing, when:

"Git up an' shake hands," growled his chief assistant. "An' watch out fer his right."

And, "Shake hands!" bellowed the referee. "Seconds out of the ring."

Bing! went the gong. Van Nest found himself immediately smothered in an avalanche of gloves that seemed to be stuffed with knobbly lumps of coal, and arrived from all angles. The aspiring "champeen" knew that it was expected of him to make an exhibition of this presumptuous young man, and he set about it with a will.

Van Nest found that fighting an earnest professional, whose business it was to dispose of his opponent in as limited a number of rounds as possible, was very different from boxing with gentlemanly amateurs or an easy-going instructor in the Yale gym. He vaguely felt ropes against his back, which the continuous stream of gloves against his face prevented him from seeing; then vacancy; then again ropes; then *—smash!*

HE FOUND himself on the floor, and for the first time since the gong had sounded he had an opportunity of opening his eyes and gathering his scattered senses. He was not hurt at all, and he knew enough to take full advantage of the count, and *think*.

Wild yells of: "Whoopee! Batter him, Billy," and "Soak it to the highbrow," began to fill him with the vague uneasiness that is disconcerting even to an experienced fighter in the face of an antagonistic crowd. But all that showed on his face was a hard tightening of the lips, and when he arose at the count of nine, he had collected his wits sufficiently to oppose a stinging left to the astonished "champeen's" rush, who had waded in confidently expecting to finish it right there.

The welcome gong surprised him, and the glorious minute of rest gave him opportunity to think again consecutively.

"Stall, ye boob," growled his seconds. "Ye've only gotta last the four, an' the money's yourn."

Van Nest "stalled" accordingly through the next round; and he thought he could detect the same weakness he had noticed while watching the exhibition bout. It was a clean opening for the jaw, that showed each time that the professional swung one of his vicious rights. Van Nest thought he could take advantage of it.

He had hold of himself now, and all through Round Three he fought with the clean-cut skill and heavy hitting that had won him the approbation of his instructor.

His chance came late in the round. Van

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Nest saw his opponent's right arm whirl around in his favorite blow, and humped his left shoulder to meet it, at the same time shooting out a straight right counter, as hard a blow as can be delivered—if it "arrives."

Smash! Van Nest's head snapped over, and he saw an accurate reproduction of a dynamite explosion. His shoulder had not been high enough. And then, through the blinding tears in his eyes, he perceived to his amazement the "champeen" staggering back from him.

The house held its breath in the sudden gasp that heralds pandemonium; and through the silence the roar of his gap-toothed second struck him like a bullet.

"Go to it, boy! Drive him!"

But Van Nest's amateur experience had not included the battering of a dazed opponent. He merely hurt his hands and wrists against hard, protruding elbows, and the professional covered safely for the remainder of the round.

Round Four. The "pro" was savage now—savage enough to forget his lesson. He waded in and smashed his right over. Van Nest's shoulder jerked up and stopped it. High enough this time; but he was thinking too much about stopping the blow to attempt any return. The professional bored in, using a hard left to the body with vicious repetitions which set Van Nest to puffing and blowing painfully. Then again the swishing right.

Thud—smack! Almost simultaneously. Willie McRivers had underrated his amateur opponent. Van Nest had been waiting for it. His left shoulder had caught the lightning swing neatly, and his own right had connected with a stiff smack against the professional's jaw. His second danced outside his corner and howled unintelligible advice at him. Van Nest knew enough to try, in his winded condition, to take the advantage which he had missed in the previous round.

He feinted his right and snapped in an uppercut, and McRivers's head jerked back with a pained expression. Van Nest sprang after him with a ready right hook—and ran full tilt into a stiff left arm which made him blink with surprise. It was not easy, this disposing of a skilful professional. He stepped in again with a swift left and right in quick succession. Their arms crossed, and the professional leaned on him in a clinch which he struggled frantically to break.

Bing! The referee sprang between them and forced them, panting and glaring, apart. Van Nest's experienced seconds grabbed hold of him and hurried him off to his dressing-room, away from the blood-lustful crowd who had witnessed the discomfiture of their idol; and he heard vaguely, as he went, the brazen referee shouting above the uproar that "Mr. Smith of this city, fighting at one hundred and fifty-six pounds, has lasted four rounds with Willie McRivers of Harlem and wins the forfeit of fifty dollars." Van Nest did not wait to collect. He struggled painfully into his clothes, and with his mind whirling in a confusion of new and battered emotions, hailed a taxicab, and had himself conveyed to the nearest hotel.

WILLIAM C. VAN NEST, Junior, was awakened late the next morning by a bellboy without his door announcing that a gentleman wished to see him; and, on his directions to show him in, a large man, who had followed right on the boy's heels, entered and regarded him dispassionately. The man was coarse and brutal-looking, and Van Nest's first idea was that his father had employed a private detective to trace him. Battered and sore though he was, his jaw stuck out pugnaciously as he inquired who the dickens the stranger might be.

The large man leered in a manner meant to be ingratiating.

"Feeling pretty sick, son, ain't yuh?"

"Who the deuce are you?" growled Van Nest again.

The large man dipped an inky-nailed finger and thumb into the pocket of a clamorous fancy vest and produced a card, on which he immediately transferred a Bertillon record of the aforesaid finger and thumb. "That's me description," he announced with complacent pride.

Van Nest read, "Mr. James Geogehan, Trainer," and the address of a well known training-camp out in the Westchester district.

"Saw yuh scrap last night, an' I come to make yuh a proposition."

"How did you know I was here?" demanded Van Nest, surprised.

"Huh! Easy. Took the number o' yer taxi."

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"Well, what do you want?" asked Van Nest.

"Well, it's like this, son. I figured yuh shaped pretty well fer a novice. Yuh had that guy goin'; an' I says to meself, 'I'll take a chancet on that kid.' So if yuh cares to go inter the game, I'll handle yuh an' stand yer trainin'-ex'es till I get yuh a try-out match."

The proposition struck Van Nest with novel force. He had never thought of such a "career," but in the face of his gloomy apprehensions of the night before anent finding employment on which to make a home for the sweetest little, etc., and in his general inexperience of the professional game, the project seemed worth thinking about. He said as much to the large man.

"All right, son," replied the other. "Yuh got me number. When yuh dopes it all out, jes' lem me hear f'm yuh."

He grinned again ingratiatingly, and departed. Van Nest hurried into his clothes and repaired to the furnished-room residence of the most lovable, etc., to acquaint her of his disagreement at home, and his new "prospects."

MISS PEARL LA RUE received him in a distracting negligée of something or other which draped somehow or other over her perfect curves; and the ardent young man was unable to see through his infatuation that the material consisted of something that furnished the most possible "style" at the least possible cost, and that the many ribbons which held it together were decidedly soiled.

Van Nest, being youthful and impulsive as ever, and confiding, began to relate his troubles and hopes to the most wonderful girl in all the world—who was even more youthful, but not at all impulsive—calculating rather, and not confiding, but coldly suspicious of a world full of hard knocks.

As "Billy" Van Nest raved on to his destruction, the expression on the face of the most lovable, etc., began to go through a kaleidoscope of changes; amazement first, followed by dismay, then disgust, then philosophical acceptance of but another disappointment in an already disillusioned life.

When he had finished—

"Well, Billy, I guess it's good-by," she remarked calmly.

"What d'you mean, good-by?" asked Billy, puzzled.

"I guess me 'n' you change cars here." Then, seeing bewilderment yet in the still confiding young man's face, she proceeded dispassionately to explain even unto the uttermost farthing. "Y'see, Billy, if your pop has let you down cold—cut you off, so to speak—what's the use of me 'n' you hangin' on?"

Confiding youth is difficult of conviction. Billy's face still expressed incredulous amazement, and he murmured feebly something about when they were married, and a home, and getting work.

"Married?" flared the most refined and lovable. "Say, kid, what made you silly? D'you think I'd play team with a startin'-out pug? Why, I'd get more dough in a week 'n you'd make in a month. Steady, too—forty weeks in the burlesque circuit. Guess again, hon."

It was unmistakable at last. Some men would have begged, pleaded; but Billy was too much like his father to plead. He was far more dazed than he had been in the furious opening round of last night, but his lips tightened again, and he quietly took leave.

It was the first big disillusionment of his sheltered life. "Disillusionment." Billy voiced the word, and remembered what his father had said about some big disillusionment bringing him back. The present was big enough to set the whole of his trustful belief in human nature rocking and hurl him into primeval chaos. But now, although the cause of disagreement had torn itself like a premature explosion from his path, he felt ashamed of having fallen out with his father over such a worthless subject, and, like many another foolish and impetuous youth before him, he determined to go out and wrest for himself a name from the grudging world before he returned to his proud and repentant parent.

He stuck out his chin in the characteristic Van Nest manner and made his way to Westchester.

Mr. James Geogehan, trainer, grinned broadly. "Hello, bub! So soon? Decided to come in out o' the wet, eh?"

Van Nest nodded shortly. He experienced an instinctive repulsion from the innate coarseness of this man; but he had put his hand to the plow, and he was not going to turn back now.

"All right, son. It's a good game, an' there's plenty o' money in it f'r both of us, if yuh're the right kind; an' yuh couldn't find no better man to handle yuh."

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In spite of his complacent egoism, the trainer was right. There was no man in New York who knew better how to get the best points out of his men, and his successes had been many; but cause and effect were almost one in this case. He was such a rigid disciplinarian, and his ideas of "looking after" his men were so high-handed and brutal, that only the best men—that is, those who were determined to make good—ever remained with him.

Van Nest was blissfully unaware of all this, as well as of nearly everything else connected with professional boxing; and he cheerfully accompanied the trainer to his "office," a dingy room which smelled appallingly of ancient sweaters and looked like a charitable home for destitute boxing-gloves, and signed away his liberty and fifty per cent. of possible future profits in an agreement which bound him to fight under the training and management of—*Jim Geogehan*, in an inscrutable scrawl.

"Now!" said Geogehan, and the ingratiating tone had given place to one of domineering insult. They were no longer strangers with a possible business deal in view; they were trainer and man. "We'll get down to business. What's yer name?"

"Why, Van Nest," said the young aspirant to fame, surprised. He had just signed it in the other's presence.

"Aw, ter ——," growled the trainer. "What's yer other name?

"William," said Van Nest.

"All right, Billy; there ain't no misters here. Now come along an' I'll put yuh next to the boys."

William C. Van Nest, Junior's, career in the professional prize ring had begun.

THE "boys" proved to be a collection of hard nuts from the tougher element of the city. Foul-mouthed as they were clean-limbed, they made up in physique what they lacked in intelligence. Abysmally ignorant of the most elementary matters, they were withal good-natured in a rough sort of way—unfailing good temper being the most vital asset, next to indomitable courage, in their profession.

Coarse they were by heredity, upbringing, and inclination, but by no means inherently brutal, as so many people seem to think, though their notions of fair play were bounded to the north and the south strictly by the Queensbury rules, and to the east and the west by their own judgment of how much they could get away with without the knowledge of the referee. Just plain professionals; ready, as in every other business, to take every advantage possible.

The trainer's appearance with the newcomer caused no cessation in the sparring, skipping, or medicine-ball exercise that they were all engaged in. It was not till a distant factory whistle announced five o'clock that the perspiring group struggled into sweaters and bathrobes and collected round.

"'Lo, Jim. What you got there?"

"Noo lad. Amatoor breakin' inter the game. Shapes well. He'll train with yuh, Herb, start'n' in t'morrer."

On the next day began the most strenuous period that Van Nest had ever known. His first realization was that according to the lights of his companions, it was himself who was utterly ignorant on every subject. He had thought that he knew boxing pretty thoroughly; but he found that what he did not know about the game was enough to excite the ready amusement of the rest. He exhibited an appalling ignorance of ring craft, as was to be expected; but his childlike trust in the chivalry of possible opponents furnished cause for roars of laughter and ribald jeers; and he began to absorb one of the greatest lessons of the profession—to keep his temper under the most difficult circumstances.

They tried him out with every low, dirty trick they knew; and when their imagination failed them, the trainer was always ready to suggest some novel way of schooling the trial youngster.

He came through the test, where so many had failed and been dismissed by the original-minded trainer, with satisfactory success and in blissful ignorance; and also through that other and more painful test, in which they tried out his gameness.

Having fulfilled the only two principles that the profession possessed, Van Nest, or Billy, as he was now universally called, was pronounced fit to be received into the society and confidences of his *confrères*. This was an honor that he did not appreciate. His upbringing and associations instinctively shrank from these men with their primitive intellects and low grade of humor. There was nothing in

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common between them. Yet he had to force himself to an appearance of friendliness, since he lived and trained amongst them. And this was one of the hardest of all the difficulties he had to overcome.

For the rest, he showed the aptitude that his college instructor had already taken such delight in, began to pick up the finer points of the game fast and developed an astonishing cleverness in footwork.

The burly trainer would stop in his stream of abuse, which he kept up on principle, and smile cunningly to himself, as he thought of future profits accruing to his pocketbook. And often he would bring strangers around, sports whom he directed to take note of his novice and reserve their bets for him at some future date.

One of these was an unobtrusive-looking gentleman with observant eyes, who appeared to be an enthusiastic fight fan, and took such an interest in Billy's progress that at every visit he insisted on seeing him "stretched" to his limit against heavier men; who, being anxious on their own account to gain the approval and possible backing of the fan, exerted themselves to the utmost and left Billy very sore, while the unobtrusive gentleman hopped with inexplicable mirth and took copious notes in a pocket book.

And then one day Jim called him over and informed him that he had arranged a match for him.

"Nothin' big—jes' a six-round whirl with a boy Dan Crawley's picked up somewheres. He's a novice, an' he's yer meat. I'm jes' puttin' yuh up so's yuh c'n get ter feel yer feet before I gives yuh a real try-out."

But none the less strenuously had Billy to train for the two weeks preceding the match. Jim Geogehan had never sent an undertrained man into the ring, however certain he might have been of the result; and further, a Heaven-directed providence had induced Crawley to say that there would be a little money in sight for his man.

The unobtrusive gentleman heard of the match with open delight, and declared that he would go straight home and book his bets in advance.

Billy trained sedulously during the interval, and when the eventful day arrived he was feeling fitter than he ever had before in his life. He was astonished to find the difference that a course of professional training made in his condition. He felt fit to fight for his whole career, as he realized that this was; and his trainer's easy confidence had dispelled the nervousness that usually comes to a novice in his first fight.

The match was scheduled as one of the preliminaries in the Columbia Club; and as Billy sat in his dressing-room, chatting easily with Geogehan and two seconds from his own "stable," the unobtrusive gentleman bustled in and informed him gleefully that he had managed to lay bets to the amount of a thousand dollars.

"*GIT* outa here!" bellowed the trainer. "Yuh'll make him nervous, yuh bonehead, if he gets thinkin' he carries all that money with him. Never yuh mind, son; we should worry about what happens to his wad."

A few minutes later:

"Second prelim. Git ready there," called a voice, and Billy was cheered by the spectacle of one of the preceding contestants being borne, limp and dead to the world, past the door.

Another minute and he sat in his corner. It was a very different sensation he experienced from that on his last appearance in the squared circle. On the previous occasion he had felt half dazed and almost frightened at his own temerity in proceeding against the unknown; but this time he felt the supreme confidence of immaculate condition and inside knowledge of the trade.

He personally walked over and examined the finger tape of his opponent, a wiry, alert-looking man; and he smiled to himself as he thought that he had a decided advantage over him in youth as well as in weight. Then he returned to his corner and held out his hands for the gloves.

"Did *you* take the pick, Jimmy?" he inquired, more to show that he knew all about it than because he really wanted to know. Then: "Look at that corner of the canvas there, Herb. Just get that fixed."

A very professional, this, versed in all the ways of his craft.

"ON MY right, gentlemen, is Billy Smith, Jim Geogehan's novice, one hundred and fifty-four pounds. On my left is Dan Crawley's Unknown, one hundred and forty-eight pounds. The bout to go six rounds." The announcer held out his arm to signify that the principals should shake hands across it. "Seconds out of the ring."

Bing!

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Billy held a ready left arm to stall off any attempt at the smothering tactics that had been his lot before; but it did not come. Instead the smaller man circled around, watching, and his movements appeared as sinuous as a snake's. Billy circled with him, thinking out and critically reviewing in fractional seconds various plans of attack. He saw a certainty; a heavy lead to the throat followed by a swift right to the heart. He put it into instant execution. His left smashed out with all the weight he had learned to use on the punching-bag—and he nearly dislocated his arm. The lithe unknown had shifted aside without apparently lifting his feet from the floor.

As the tarantula on the wall dodges the boot hurled at it, and shoots away a foot or more without visible motion of its legs, so the stranger had miraculously removed himself without shiftidg his feet, and now stood poised evenly and as motionlessly alert as a great spider.

Billy felt humiliated. It was a bad miss, and he wondered how he had failed to notice before the sure opening for a high feint at the head and a corkscrew jab at the solar plexus. He began to work himself into a position to take advantage of it; and as he mapped out his moves—*thud-smack-thud*. His head snapped back and he grunted involuntarily from two heavy drives to the body.

The unknown stood balanced again as if on eggs, and only the streaked resin on the canvas showed that he had moved at all. Billy backed a little and began to circle again. He needed time to think. This man was clever. And as he turned, the sinuous figure was presently close to him again, though the feet never lifted from the floor. This was an uncanny peculiarity of the unknown's. He softly and swiftly shifted his feet forward an inch at a time, never bearing his whole weight on either and always retaining a perfect balance. Billy had to back away again, and the swiftly shuffling feet followed ever after. Suddenly—

"Look out fer the ropes!" called Geogehan, and Billy sprang aside, just in time to avoid being cornered.

"Why don't youse guys fight?" yelled a voice. Billy realized the pertinence of the remark, and in hot shame began to work in toward his opponent instead of backing away.

He saw a sure opening again. *Bang!* His glove met two others, one of which instantly circled in a swift arc for his neck. He jerked forward, and they fell into a clinch. That was better; his weight would tell. He shoved the smaller man off and landed a flush hit on the passionless face, which was snatched away so rapidly that the blow fell harmless.

Bing! "Time!"

"Why the —— didn't yuh rustle him?" began Geogehan in Billy's ear. "That round was all hisn. Carry it to him, yuh blank-blanked boob!"

Billy burned with mortification and set out to retrieve his honor. No sooner had they met in the center than he drove in a hard right and left to the head, one of which landed fair and strong; but he received a stinging return in the throat that drove him back a pace. Then swiftly, *bang, bang*, over both eyes, causing him to blink uncomfortably. There was a beautiful opening over the unknown's heart; but Billy had become chary of taking advantage of these certainties.

"Rustle him, yuh big stiff!" came from his corner; and Billy stepped in to rustle. His left arm nearly flew out of the socket again, and a glove that weighed as much as a brick fell on the back of his neck. He spun around to face his man, who had miraculously got behind him, and as soon as he got into the proper position received three stinging jabs, one after the other, full in the face.

Billy's chief asset was a great backward jump which carried him far out of range and landed him with both feet in perfect position. He used it now; and all he could see as soon as he shook the water from his eyes was that vibrantly motionless figure with the swiftly shuffling feet. The face was as devoid of expression as a reptile's, and the effect was heightened by the hidden eyes, which are the windows of thought; for the uncanny stranger kept them directed at his opponent's middle.

He was weaving in again into range. Billy saw no opening this time, and desperately led at the place where he hoped the elusive head would remain.

Smack! Billy had him—full and fair on the chin, with the whole of a hundred and fifty-six pounds behind it.

"Six—seven——"

The man raised himself slowly to his left knee with his right glove touching the ground; and his eyes were directed, not at

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Billy's face, but at his feet, which were apparently all he needed to judge his distances by.

"Nine——" He was on both feet and had shot back a whole yard with a single sliding movement.

"Chase him," yelled Geogehan; and Billy rushed in—to a clinch from which he vainly tried to break. His opponent held him as an anaconda envelops its prey, helpless to retreat or retaliate.

And all the while there was no word of advice from Dan Crawley's corner.

"Time!" Geogehan's stream of profanity commenced before Billy reached his chair, and never ceased through the whole minute, except to reiterate savagely: "A gosh-blanked novice; an' half yer weight! Drive'm, blast yuh! Stan' up 'n' slug'm."

They were on their feet again; and the uncanny stranger, with the vitality and sinuous body of a snake and the feet of a spider, was edging forward with his awful onward shuffle once more. Billy saw not a hint of an opening, and tried to repeat his former success.

It was like monkeying with the mainspring drum of a cheap watch. Just as the disk will snap off, and the whole mechanism will fly into a mass of wheels and cogs and swelling miles of steel spring whirling in all directions, so the unknown seemed to disintegrate into a galvanized whirlwind of piston arms and circling gloves.

It was the last time that Billy really saw him. His own arm heavily smote nothing, and at the same instant he was blinded with a terriffic *one-two* full over the eyes.

Bang! Thud! Smack! In the face, on the body, on the jaw, wherever for an instant an opening showed, the blows fell like hoofs. *Bang* again, over the carotid artery; and Billy went down spineless.

Dimly from the floor he could see the lithe figure, poised motionless as a venomous snake, ready to strike on the instant.

At "five" he rose to his feet, all the ring craft battered out of him; and the man struck, as a snake strikes. *One-two-three,* with incredible swiftness on the same spot, and Billy reeled away from the impact and hung limp over the ropes.

The referee cautioned his Nemesis away.

"Three paces," he growled. "This club is no slaughter house." And he gave Billy a chance to show whether he could resume. Billy's head swung like a catboat at sea and the whole floor rocked under his feet, but he pushed himself from the ropes, lurched into a clinch, and hung on in spite of the uppercuts and hooks that stung home till the gong jarred on his buzzing ears.

Geogehan was too overcome even to swear.

"Quit," was all he said. "Throw it up. A blanked unknown fr'm nowhere, a nobody; an' he's got yuh licked all 'round the house!"

"Quit, ——!" gasped Billy; and Geogehan spat disgustedly over the edge.

"Time!" The minute had sped like a quarter, and Billy dragged his clogging feet to the center, where the human reptile waited—motionless, expressionless, with lowered eyes. Billy stood the fusillade for several seconds. His sagging arms seemed a pitifully feeble means of defense against those lightning gloves that ripped in from every unexpected angle. Then the floor seemed to rise slowly toward him, and presently he was lying on it again, wondering whether he would be able to rise before the fatal "ten."

He was up again, he didn't know how, and was making futile passes at a flitting face without any eyes that he seemed to go right through.

"——, what a glutton!" muttered the referee.

And then he was hanging on in a clinch again, his wonderful staying-power that came from clean living saving him from the knockout that would have come already in the previous round with most fighters.

Suddenly—

"Break away there, you!" A voice from infinite space filtered through the roaring cataract in his ears. "That's enough!" And he felt himself assisted to his chair.

IT WAS all over. Billy's splendid youth needed but a minute or so to recover sufficiently to walk to his dressing-room, where Geogehan was waiting for him like an animal balked in its trail. He had lost money, and he had just met the unobtrusive gentleman, whose unalloyed joy convinced the trainer that he had bet *against* his novice. He did not stop to wonder why; he was too infuriated. He cursed viperishly for five minutes, and "rubbed it in" on Billy with a venomous tongue that made the boy wince and burn with shame.

"I thought to make a fighter of yuh,"

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he snarled. "Yuh thought yuh cud fight; an' here an unknown, f'm nowhere, at half yer weight, beats the lights out o' yuh in footwork an' headwork an' punchin' an' everythin'! Yuh ain't got the cast-off underclothes of a fighter. Yuh're jes' a blamed amatoor, 'n' I'm through with yuh. Yuh c'n pack yer traps first thing t'morrer 'n' git outa my camp. I'm through." And he flung out of the room.

Billy's seconds, though mystified and astonished, were more sympathetic.

"Comin' home, Billy?" ventured the one known as Herb. Billy roused himself.

"No," he declared with conviction. "I'm going to a hotel. Good-by, you fellows."

He strode out and climbed wearily into an eager taxicab—and the unobtrusive gentleman with observant eyes flitted out from a shadow and followed.

Disheartened, William C. Van Nest, Junior, followed a bellboy, who looked at his face and wondered, to the first room offered, and slumped down into a chair, where, with his head sunk between his hands, he resumed his attitude of utter despondency.

Geogehan's words were true. He had thought he could fight; in fact, he had fancied himself. He had thought that he would make a success at it; and here he was, a failure—a ridiculous failure, shown up by a novice smaller and lighter than himself. He burned with the shame of it, and only the pugnacious jaw kept his lips from trembling. He had been sitting in the same position of despair for half an hour when the door rattled to a knock.

"Gen'l'man t' see you, sir." Following right on the announcement, just as had happened on Billy's last visit to a hotel, the gentleman walked in—and William C. Van Nest, Senior, stood before his son.

The boy sprang to his feet, startled, bewildered, defiant; for he felt that the whole world must know of his shame.

Had his father come to jeer at his discomfiture? But a single look at the strong, kindly face reassured him. Besides, he reflected, he could not possibly know.

"How did you know I was here?" were the words that blurted to his lips.

"Oh, I just had a telephone message from an—er—acquaintance of mine to say that he had just fol—er—just seen you enter this hotel."

"Oh!" said Billy, relieved.

The old man spoke very gravely.

"I came to ask a favor of you, Will. I'm lonely. I miss you at home. Won't you come back and keep me company?"

For an instant the boy hesitated. He came forward with a bitter admission:

"I guess you were right, dad. You win. I lost twice, tonight."

"Lose? What was the other losing Will? How 'lose'?"

"Oh—nothing. Only thing that puzzles me—" and he broke out in a real smile—"is whether you or the other fellow beat me first."

"You don't lose to me, old son. You win. I'm lonely. And if you care for——"

"Let's forget her, dad. The car waiting?"

"Yump!"

When they reached the Park Avenue apartment his father said only:

"Tired, old son? Better toddle to bed, and we'll talk over everything—or nothing—in the morning."

But William C., Senior, did not go to bed—not till after he had somewhat secretively received a call from that burly personage, Mr. Dan Crawley, manager of the phenomenal "unknown."

Mr. William C. Van Nest, Senior, artist in diplomacy, unlocked his desk with a smile and took out a man-sized roll of bills, which he handed to Mr. Dan Crawley.

"It's robbery, Crawley, but it was worth it. Better count them."

"Oh, no. That's all right, Mr. Van Nest. I ain't afraid."

"How did it go, Crawley? He found my youngster pretty easy meat, I suppose?"

"Oh, no; not by a darned sight, Mr. Van Nest. That's a great boy, straight. I ain't kidding you; he sure is. Your boy put up as good a fight as I ever seen, and clever. But then, Mr. Van Nest, what chance 'd the best amachoor in the world have against Spider McGee? Spider'll be champeen of the States now, just as easy as he got to be champeen of Australia. *An'* New Zealand. He sent you his best, Mr. Van Nest, and his thanks for his share in the graft. Good night, Mr. Van Nest."

"Hm, hm, wait a minute," remarked the magnate. "How did the rounds go? So the boy was clever, eh? Stood up, did he, eh? What will you have to drink, Crawley? Clever was he, eh? Well, well, well, well! I've got some rather decent Scotch here, Crawley."

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The LAUGHING CAVALIER

by BARONESS ORCZY

SYNOPSIS—Holland in 1624 was under the heel of its Stadtholder, *Maurice, Prince of Orange*, whom *Willem, Lord of Stoutenburg*, is planning to assassinate and succeed. *Gilda Beresteyn*, whom Stoutenburg had jilted years before, learns of the project. Fearing that she will tell, Stoutenburg induces her brother *Nicolaes* to arrange for her abduction, saying that he will marry her when he becomes Stadtholder.

As the kidnapper they have engaged a merry, chivalrous soldier of fortune known as *Diogenes*, an ancestor of *the Scarlet Pimpernel*, and the subject of *Frans Hals'* picture, "The Laughing Cavalier," which the great artist has just painted. Diogenes, with two comrades in arms called *Pythagoras* and *Socrates*, is now escorting Gilda from her home in Haarlem to the house of the banker *Ben Isaje*, near Rotterdam. Circumstances force Diogenes into a meeting with Gilda's father, *Cornelius;* and, not knowing that the soldier is his daughter's abductor, the elder Beresteyn induces Diogenes to promise that he will rescue the girl.

In the meantime, acting on the reports of one *Jan*, a spy, Stoutenburg arranges to waylay Maurice near Ryswick and assassinate him. As the conspirators think they have grounds to suspect Diogenes' good faith, they decide that they will set Jan to shadow the Laughing Cavalier, while Stoutenburg starts to obtain information from a Spanish beggar girl whom the young soldier of fortune had befriended.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE BIRTH OF HATE

HERE the three men parted—Beresteyn and Jan to go to "The Lame Cow" inn, where the latter was to begin his work of keeping track of Diogenes, and Stoutenburg to find his way to that squalid lodging-house which was situate at the bottom of the Kleine Hout Straat, where it abuts on the Oude Gracht.

It had been somewhat impulsively that he had suggested to Beresteyn that he would endeavor to obtain some information from the Spanish beggar wench as to Diogenes's plans and movements and the whereabouts of Gilda, and now that he was alone with more sober thoughts he realized that the suggestion had not been overbacked by reason.

Still, as Beresteyn had said, there could be no harm in seeking out the girl. Stoutenburg was quite satisfied in his mind that she

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must be the rascal's sweetheart, else she had not lent him a helping hand in the abduction of Gilda; and since he himself was well supplied with money through the generosity of his rich friends in Haarlem, he had no doubt that if the wench knew anything at all about the rogue, she could easily be threatened first, then bribed and cajoled into telling all that she knew, notwithstanding the fact that Diogenes had twice saved her life out of pure gallantry.

In this, luck chose to favor the Lord of Stoutenburg, for the girl was on the doorstep when he finally reached the house where two nights ago the young soldier of fortune had so generously given up his lodgings to the wench and her crippled father. He had just been vaguely wondering how best he could, without endangering his own safety, obtain information as to which particular warren in the house she and her father inhabited, when he saw her standing under the lintel of the door, her meager figure faintly lit up by the glimmer of a street lamp fixed in the wall just above her head.

"I would have speech of thee," he said in his usual peremptory manner, as he approached her. "Show me the way to thy room at once. Thy safety and that of thy father depends on thy obedience. There is close search in the city just now for Spanish spies."

"I have nothing to fear," she murmured under her breath.

"Perhaps not," he rejoined, "but the man who shelters and protects thee is under suspicion of abetting Spanish spies. For his sake 'twere wiser if thou didst obey me."

Stoutenburg had every reason to congratulate himself on his shrewd guess; for at his words all resistance on the girl's part vanished, and though she began to tremble in every limb and even for a moment seemed ready to swoon, she murmured words which, if incoherent, certainly sounded submissive, and then silently led the way upstairs. He followed her closely, stumbling behind her in the dark. As he mounted the rickety steps he was rapidly rehearsing in his mind what he would say to the wench.

On the landing she paused; and, taking a key from between the folds of her shift, she opened the door of her lodging and humbly begged the gracious mynheer to enter. A tallow candle placed upon a chair threw its feeble light upon the squalid abode, the whitewashed walls, the primitive bedstead in the corner, made up of deal planks and covered with a straw mattress and a thin blanket. From beneath that same blanket came the gentle moanings of the old cripple.

STOUTENBURG dragged a chair out to the middle of the room and sat himself astride upon it, his arms resting across the back, his booted and spurred feet thrust out in front of him; whilst his hollow, purple-rimmed eyes, with their feverish glow of ever-present inward excitement, were fixed upon the girl.

"I must tell thee, wench," he began abruptly, "that I mean to be thy friend. No harm shall come to thee if thou wilt answer truthfully certain questions which I would ask of thee."

Then, as she appeared too frightened to reply and only cast a furtive, timorous glance on him, he continued after a slight pause:

"The man who protected thee against the rabble the other night, and who gave thee shelter afterward, the man in whose bed thy crippled father lies at this moment—he is thy sweetheart, is he not?"

"What is that to you?" she retorted sullenly.

"Nothing in itself," he said quietly. "I merely spoke of it to show thee how much I know. Let me tell thee at once that I was in the tavern with him on New Year's Eve, when his boon companions told the tale of how he had protected thee against a crowd; and that I was in this very street not twenty paces away when in response to thy appeal he gave up his room and his bed to thee, and for thy sake paced the streets for several hours in the middle of the night, in weather that must have frozen the marrow in his bones."

"Well? What of that?" said she simply.

"Thou art in love with that fine gallant—eh, my girl?" he continued, with a harsh, flippant laugh. "And art not prepared to own to it. Well, I'll not press thee for a confession. Let me but tell thee this; that the man whom thou lovest is in deadly danger of his life."

"Great God, have pity on him!" she exclaimed involuntarily.

"In a spirit of wanton mischief—for he is not so faithful to thee as thou wouldst wish—he has abducted a lady from this city, as thou well knowest, since thou didst lend

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him thy help in the commission of this crime.

"Thou seest," he added roughly, "that denials on thy part were worse than useless, since I know everything. The lady's father is an important magistrate in this city. He has moved every process of the law so that he may mete out an exemplary punishment to the blackguard who has dared to filch his daughter."

"Lord have mercy upon us!" once again murmured the wretched girl, whose cheeks now looked gray and shrunken.

"Mynheer Beresteyn will have none on thy sweetheart, I'll warrant thee, unless——"

He paused significantly, measuring the effect of his words and of that dramatic pause upon the tense sensibilities of the girl.

"Unless—what?" came almost as a dying murmur from her parched throat.

"Unless thou wilt lend a hand to save him."

"I?" she cried pathetically. "I would give my hand, my tongue, my sight—my life, to save him!"

"Come!" he said. "That's brave! But it will not be necessary to make quite so violent a sacrifice.

"I have great power, too, in this city and great influence over the bereaved father," he continued, lying unblushingly. "I know that if I can restore his daughter to him within the next four-and-twenty hours, I could prevail upon him to give up pursuit of the villain who abducted her, and to let him go free."

But these words were not yet fully out of his mouth before she had fallen on her knees before him, clasping her thin hands together and raising up to his hard face large, dark eyes that were brimful of tears.

"Will you do that, then, oh my gracious lord?" she pleaded. "Oh, God will reward you if you will do this!"

"How can I, thou crazy wench?" he retorted. "How can I restore the damsel to her sorrowing father when I do not know where she is?"

"But——"

"It is from thee I want to hear where the lady is."

"From me?"

"Why, yes! Of course! Thou art in the confidence of thy lover, and knowest where he keeps the lady hidden. Tell me where she is, and I will pledge thee my word that thou and he will have nothing more to fear."

"He is not my lover," she murmured dully, "nor am I in his confidence."

SHE was still on her knees, but had fallen back on her heels, with arms hanging limp and helpless by her side. Hope so suddenly arisen had as quickly died out of her heart, and her pinched face expressed in every line the despair and misery which had come in its wake.

"Come!" he cried harshly. "Play no tricks with me, wench. Thou didst own to being the rascal's sweetheart."

"I owned to my love for him," she said simply, "not to his love for me."

"I tell thee that he will hang or burn unless thou art willing to help him."

"And I told you, gracious sir, that I would give my life for him."

"Which is quite unnecessary. All I want is the knowledge of where he keeps the lady whom he has outraged."

"I can not help you, mynheer, in that."

"Thou wilt not!" he cried.

"I can not," she reiterated gently. "I do not know where she is."

"Thou dost perjure thyself and wilt rue it, wench," he exclaimed as he jumped to his feet, and with a loud curse kicked the chair away from him.

The Lord of Stoutenburg was not a man who had been taught to curb his temper. He had always given way to his passions, allowing them as the years went on to master every tender feeling within him. For years now he had sacrificed everything to them—to his ambition, to his plans for revenge upon the Stadtholder who had slain his father and brothers, to his loves and hates.

Now that this fool of a girl tried to thwart him, as he thought, he allowed his fury against her full rein, to the exclusion of reason, of prudence, of ordinary instincts of chivalry. He stooped over her like a great, gaunt bird of prey. His thin, clawlike hand fastened itself on her thin shoulder.

"Thou liest, girl," he said hoarsely, "or art playing with me. Money thou shalt have. Name thy price. I'll pay thee all that thou wouldst ask. Think of thy lover under torture, on the rack, burned at the stake!"

She gave a loud scream of agony. Her hands went up to her ears; her eyes stared out of her head like those of one in a frenzy of terror.

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"Pity! Pity! My lord, have pity! I swear that I do not know."

"*Verdomme!*" he cried out in the madness of his rage, as with a cruel twist of his hand he threw the wretched girl off her balance and sent her half fainting, cowering on the floor.

"*Verdommt* be thou, *plepshurk!*" came in a ringing voice from behind him.

The next moment he felt as if two grapnels made of steel had fastened themselves on his shoulders, and as if a weight of irresistible power were pressing him down, down on to his knees. His legs shook under him; his bones seemed literally to be cracking beneath that iron grip, and he had not the power to turn around in order to see who his assailant was.

The attack had taken him wholly by surprise, and it was only when his knees finally gave way under him, and he too was down on the ground, licking the dust of the floor as he had forced the wretched girl to do, that he had a moment's respite from that cruel pressure and was able to turn in the direction whence it had come.

Diogenes, with those wide shoulders of his squared out to their full breadth, legs apart, and arms crossed over his mighty chest, was standing over Stoutenburg, his eyes aflame and his mustache bristling till it stood out like the tusks of a boar.

"*Dondersteen!*" he exclaimed, as he watched the other man's long, lean figure thus sprawling on the ground. "This is a pretty pass to which to bring this highly civilized and cultured country! Men are beginning to browbeat and strike the women now! *Dondersteen!*"

STOUTENBURG, whose vocabulary of oaths was at least as comprehensive as that of any foreign adventurer, had—to its accompaniment—struggled at last to his feet.

"You——" he began as soon as he had partially recovered his breath.

But Diogenes, putting up his hand, hastily interrupted.

"Do not speak just now, mynheer," he said with his wonted good humor. "Were you to speak now, I feel that your words would not be characterized by that dignity and courtesy which one would expect from so noble a gentleman."

"*Smeerlap!*" began Stoutenburg once more.

"There now!" rejoined the other with imperturbable jollity. "What did I tell you? Believe me, sir, 'tis much the best to be silent if pleasant words fail to reach one's lips."

"A truce on this nonsense, sir!" quoth Stoutenburg hotly. "You took me unawares, like a coward——"

"Well said, mynheer! Like a coward. That is just how I took you—in the act of striking a miserable atom of humanity, who is as defenseless as a sparrow."

"'Tis ludicrous indeed to see a man of your calling posing as the protector of women!" retorted Stoutenburg with a sneer. "But enough of this. You find me unarmed at this moment, else you had already paid for this impudent interference."

"I thank you, sir," said Diogenes as he swept the Lord of Stoutenburg a deep, ironical bow. "I thank you for thus momentarily withholding chastisement from my unworthiness. When may I have the honor of calling on your Magnificence in order that you might mete unto me the punishment which I have so amply deserved?"

"That chastisement will lose nothing by waiting, since indeed your insolence passes belief," quoth Stoutenburg hotly.

"Now go!" he added, choosing not to notice the wilfully impertinent attitude of the other man. "Leave me alone with this wench. My business is with her."

"So is mine, gracious lord," rejoined Diogenes with a bland smile, "else I were not here. This room is mine—perhaps your Magnificence did not know that; you would not like surely to remain my guest a moment longer than you need."

"Of a truth I knew that the baggage was your sweetheart; else I had not come at all."

"Leave off insulting the girl, man," said Diogenes whose mustache bristled again, a sure sign that his temper was on the boil. "She has told you the truth; she knows nothing of the whereabouts of the noble lady who hath disappeared from Haarlem. If you desire information on that point you had best get it elsewhere."

But Stoutenburg had in the meanwhile succeeded in recovering—at any rate partially—his presence of mind.

Something of his old-time haughtiness and pride of caste now crept into the attitude of John of Barneveld's son, and prudence

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also suggested that he should feign to ignore the rough usage which he had received at the hands of this contemptible rascal.

Though he was by no means unarmed—for he never went abroad these days without a poniard in his belt—he had of a truth no mind to engage in a brawl with this young Hercules whose profession was that of arms and who might in consequence easily get the better of him. He made every effort, therefore, to remain calm and to look as dignified as his disordered toilet would allow.

"You heard what I said to this girl?" he queried, speaking carelessly.

"You screamed loudly enough," replied Diogenes lightly. "I heard you through the closed door. I confess that I listened for quite a long while; your conversation greatly interested me. I interfered only when I thought it necessary."

"So, then, I need not repeat what I said," quoth the other lightly. "Hanging for you, my man, unless you tell me where you have hidden Jongejuffrouw Beresteyn."

"I? What have I to do with that noble lady, pray?"

"It is futile to bandy words with me. I know every circumstance of the disappearance of the lady, and could denounce you to the authorities within half an hour, and see you hanged before sunrise."

"Then I do wonder," said Diogenes suavely, "that your Magnificence doth not do this, for of a truth you must hate me quite thoroughly by now."

"Hate you, man? I'd gladly see you hanged or, better still, broken on the wheel. But I must know from you first where you have hidden the jongejuffrouw."

"If I am to hang anyway, sir, why should I trouble to tell you?"

"The lady is my affianced wife," said Stoutenburg haughtily. "I have every right to demand an explanation from you; why you are here when by the terms of your contract with my friend Nicolaes Beresteyn you should at this moment be on your way to Rotterdam, escorting the jongejuffrouw to the house of Ben Isaje, the banker. . . . You see that I am well informed," he added impatiently, seeing that Diogenes had become suddenly silent, and that a curious shadow had spread over his persistently smiling face.

"So well informed, sir," rejoined the latter after a slight pause, and speaking more seriously than he had done hitherto, "so well informed that I marvel you do not know that by the terms of that same contract I pledged my word to convey the jongejuffrouw safely to a certain spot and with all possible speed, but that further actions on my part were to remain for mine own guidance. I also pledged my word of honor that I would remain silent about all these matters."

"BAH!" broke in Stoutenburg roughly. "Knaves like you have no honor to pledge."

"No doubt, sir, you are the best judge of what a knave would do."

"Insolent! Do you dare——"

"If you like it better, sir, I'll say that I have parleyed long enough with you to suit my temper. This room is mine," he added, speaking every whit as haughtily as did the other man. "I have business with this wench, and came here desirous to speak with her alone, so I pray you go! This roof is too lowly to shelter the Lord of Stoutenburg."

At mention of his name Stoutenburg's sunken cheeks took on the color of lead, and with a swift, instinctive gesture his hand flew to the hilt of the dagger under his doublet. During his hot and brief quarrel with this man, the thought had never entered his mind that his identity might be known to his antagonist; that he, a fugitive from justice with a heavy price still upon his head, was even now at the mercy of this contemptible adventurer whom he had learned to hate as he had never hated a single human soul before.

Prudence, however, was quick enough to warn him not to betray himself completely. The knave obviously suspected his identity. How he did that Stoutenburg could not conjecture, but after all he might only have drawn a bow at a venture; it was important above all not to let him see that that shaft had struck home. Therefore, after the first instant of terror and surprise, he resumed as best he could his former haughty attitude, and said with well feigned carelessness:

"The Lord of Stoutenburg? Do you expect his visit, then? What have you to do with him? 'Tis dangerous, you know, to court his friendship just now."

"I do not court his friendship, sir," rejoined Diogenes with his gently ironical smile. "The Lord of Stoutenburg hath many enemies these days; and methinks

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that if it came to a question of hanging he would stand at least as good a chance of the gallows as I."

"No doubt, if you know how to lay hands on him, you would be over-ready to denounce him to the Stadtholder, for the sake of the blood money which you would receive for this act."

"Well played, my lord," retorted Diogenes with a ringing laugh. "*Dondersteen!* But you apparently think me a fool as well as a knave. Lay my hands on the Lord of Stoutenburg, did you say? By St. Bavon, have I not done so already? Aye! And made him lick the dust, too, at my feet? I could sell him to the Stadtholder without further trouble—denounce him even now to the authorities; only that I do not happen to be a vendor of swine flesh. Or else——"

A double cry interrupted the flow of Diogenes's wrathful eloquence; a cry of rage from Stoutenburg and one of terror from the girl, who all this while, not understanding the cause and purport of the quarrel between the two men, had been cowering in a remote corner of the room.

But now she suddenly ran forward, swift as a deer, unerring as a cat, and the next moment she had thrown herself on the upraised arm of Stoutenburg, in whose hand gleamed the sharp steel of his dagger.

"Murder!" she cried in a frenzy of horror. "Save thyself! He will murder thee!"

Diogenes, as was his wont, threw back his head and sent his merry laugh echoing through the tumbledown house.

"Let go his arm, wench," he cried gaily. "He'll not hurt me, never fear. Hatred has drawn a film over his eyes and caused his hand to tremble. Put back your poniard, my lord," he added lightly. "The penniless adventurer and paid hireling is unworthy of your steel. Keep it whetted for your own defense, and for the protection of the gracious lady who has plighted her troth to you."

"Name her not, man!" cried Stoutenburg, whose arm had dropped by his side, but whose voice was still hoarse with the passion of hate which now consumed him.

"Is her name polluted through passing my lips? Yet is she under my protection, placed there by those who should have guarded her honor with their lives."

"Touch my future wife but with the tips of thy fingers, *plepshurk*, and I'll hang thee on the nearest tree with mine own hands!"

"Wait to threaten, my lord, until you have the power; until then go your way. I, the miserable rascal whom you abhor, the knave whom you despise, do give you your life and your freedom; which, as you well know, I hold at this moment in the hollow of my hand. But remember that I give it you only because to my mind one innocent woman has already suffered quite enough because of you, without having to mourn the man whom she loves, and being widowed ere she is a wife.

"To suit your own ends you entrusted her to me—to a knave, a rascal, a *plepshurk!* Well, to suit mine own ends, I'll not let you approach her until, having accomplished the errand for which I am being paid, I myself escort the lady back to her father. To this also am I pledged. Both these pledges do I mean to fulfil and you, my lord, do but waste your time in arguing with me."

Now that Diogenes, after he had finished speaking, turned unceremoniously on his heel and left Stoutenburg standing in the middle of the room, the latter hesitated for a few minutes longer. Angry and contemptuous words were all ready to his lips, but Diogenes was paying no heed to him. He had drawn the girl with him to the bedside of the cripple and there began talking quietly in whispers to her. Stoutenburg saw that he gave the wench some money.

Smothering a final, comprehensive oath the noble lord went quietly out of the room.

CHAPTER XXIV

AN ARRANT KNAVE

IN THE street below, not far from the house which he had just quit, Stoutenburg came on Nicolaes and Jan ensconced in the dark against a wall. Beresteyn quickly explained to his friend the reason of his presence here.

"I came with Jan," he said, "because I wished to speak with you without delay."

"Come as far as the cathedral, then," said Stoutenburg curtly. "I feel that in this *vervloekte* street the walls and windows are full of ears and prying eyes.

"Jan," he added, turning to the other man, "you must remain here and on no account lose sight of that rascal when he leaves this house. Follow him in and out of Haarlem, and if you do not see me again

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tonight, join me at Ryswick as soon as you can; and come there prepared with full knowledge of his plans."

Leaving Jan in observation, the two men made their way now in the direction of the Groote Markt.

As Stoutenburg had surmised, the porch of the cathedral was lonely and deserted; even the beggars had all gone home for the night. A tiny lamp fixed in the paneling of the wall flickered dimly in the draft. Stoutenburg sat down on the wooden bench, dark and polished with age, which ran alongside one of the walls, and with a brusk and febrile gesture drew his friend down beside him.

"Well?" he asked in that nervous, jerky way of his. "What is it?"

"Something that will horrify you, just as it did me," replied Beresteyn, who spoke breathlessly, as if under stress of grave excitement. "When I parted from you an hour ago, I did what you asked me to do. I posted Jan outside the door of the *tapperij* after I had pointed out our rogue to him through the glass door. Imagine my astonishment when I saw that at that moment our rascal was in close conversation with my father!"

"With your father?"

"With my father," reiterated Beresteyn. "That fool Hals was with him, and there were another half dozen busybodies sitting 'round the table. Our man was evidently the center of interest; I could not then hear what was said, but at one moment I saw that my father shook him cordially by the hand."

"*Vervloekte Keerl!*" exclaimed Stoutenburg.

"I didn't know at first what to do. I didn't want to go into the *tapperij* and show myself just then, but at all costs I wished to know what my father and that arrant rascal had to say to one another.

"So, bidding Jan on no account to lose sight of the man, I made my way 'round to the service door behind the bar, and there bribed one of the wenches to let me stand under the lintel and to remain on the watch. It was quite dark where I stood, and I had a good view of the *tapperij* without fear of being seen; and as my father and that cursed adventurer were speaking loudly enough I could hear all that they said."

"Well?" queried Stoutenburg impatiently.

"Well, my friend," quoth Beresteyn with slow emphasis, "that *vervloekte* scoundrel was making a promise to my father to bring Gilda safely back to Haarlem, and my father was promising him a fortune as his reward."

"I am not surprised," remarked Stoutenburg calmly.

"But——"

"That man, my friend, is the most astute blackguard I have ever come across in the whole course of my life. His English blood, I imagine, hath made him into a thoroughgoing rogue. He has played you false—always did mean to play you false if it suited his purpose! By ——, Nicolaes! What fools we were to trust one of these foreign adventurers! They'll do anything for money, and this man, instead of being, as we thought, an exception to the rule, is a worse scoundrel than any of his compeers. He has simply taken Gilda a little way out of Haarlem, and then came back here to see what bargain he could strike with your father for her return."

"Gilda is some way out of Haarlem," rejoined Beresteyn thoughtfully. "Jan and I heard that knave talking to his friend Hals later on. Hals was asking him to sup and sleep at his house. But he declined the bed, though he accepted the supper.

" 'I have a journey before me this night,' he said, 'and must leave the city at moonrise.' It seemed to me that he meant to travel far."

"Let me have Jan and one or two of Heemskerk's mercenaries," urged Beresteyn. "We could seize him and his papers tonight as soon as he leaves the city gates."

"Then out of revenge," said Stoutenburg, "he will refuse to tell us what he hath done with Gilda."

"Bah!" retorted Beresteyn cynically. "Here in Haarlem we can always apply torture."

"Then if he speaks, Gilda can be back here in time to denounce us all.

"No, no, my friend," continued Stoutenburg firmly, "let us own at once that by trusting that scoundrel we have run our heads into a noose out of which only our wits can extricate us. We must meet cunning with cunning; treachery, if need be, with treachery. Gilda, of course, must not remain at the mercy of brigands, but she must not be given her freedom to do us the harm which she hath already threatened.

"Remember this, Nicolaes," he added,

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placing his hand upon his friend's shoulder and forcing Beresteyn to look straight into his own feverishly glowing eyes; "remember that when all these troubles are over, Gilda will become my wife. The devotion of my entire life shall then compensate her for the slight wrong which Fate compels us to do her at this moment. Will you remember that, my friend?"

"I do remember it," replied the other, "but——"

"And will you try and trust me as you would yourself?"

"I do trust you, Willem, as I would trust myself; only tell me what you want to do."

"I want to bring that knave to the gallows without compromising you and the success of our cause," said Stoutenburg firmly.

"Can I help you in any way?"

"Not at present; I have no definite plans just now. All I know is that we must possess ourselves of the rascal's person, as well as of Gilda, without the risk of compromising ourselves. In this, of course, we have now Jan's valuable help: he is a splendid leader, and entirely trustworthy where the cause of his own hatred against the Prince is served."

"And of course you have the thirty or forty men—mercenaries and louts—whom Heemskerk, van Does and the others have been recruiting for you."

"Exactly. I can easily detail half a dozen of them to follow Jan. That is our first move, my good Beresteyn," he added emphatically; "to gain possession of Gilda, and to capture the rascal. Only tell me this: what are the papers now in that knave's possession which might compromise you if they were found?"

"I had to write a letter to Ben Isaje, telling him to convince himself that Gilda was safe and in good health ere he paid the rascal a sum of three thousand guilders. This letter is writ in mine own hand and signed with my name. Then there is a formal order to Ben Isaje to pay over the money, but that was writ in the usual way by the public scrivener and is signed with the cipher which I always use in all monetary transactions with the banker. He keeps these formal documents in his archives, and all his clients use a cipher in the same way."

"How is that formal order worded?"

"As far as I remember it runs thus:

"In consideration of valuable services rendered to me by the bearer of this note, I desire you to pay him the sum of three thousand guilders out of my moneys which lie with you at interest.

"The cipher signature consists of the words 'Schwarze Kato,' surmounted by a triangle."

"And is that cipher known to any one save to Ben Isaje?"

"Alas, it is known to my father. We both use it for private business transactions."

"But to Gilda?" insisted Stoutenburg. "Would Gilda know it if she saw it?"

"She could not be certain of it—though of course she might guess. 'Schwarze Kato' is the name of a tulip raised by my father, and the triangle is a sign used sometimes by our house in business. But it would be mere conjecture on her part."

"Then everything will still be for the best, never fear, my good Beresteyn," exclaimed Stoutenburg, whose hard, cruel face was glowing with excitement. "Chance indeed has been on our side throughout this business. If you will trust me to finish it now, you'll have no cause for anxiety or regrets. Come! Let us find Jan at once! I have a few orders to give him, and then mean to be on my way to Ryswick tonight."

HE AROSE to his feet, and now the glitter in his hollow eyes appeared almost inhuman. He was a man whose whole soul fed upon hatred, upon vengeance planned and accomplished, upon desire for supreme power; and at this moment his scheme for murdering the Stadtholder was backed by one for obtaining possession of the woman he loved and for being revenged on the man who had insulted and jeered at him.

Beresteyn, always ready to accept the leadership of his friend, followed him in silence down the street. After a while they once more came upon Jan, who apparently had never moved all this while from his post of observation.

"Well?" asked Stoutenburg in a scarce-audible whisper. "Has he not gone yet?"

"Not yet," replied Jan.

Stoutenburg cast a quick, almost furtive glance in the direction of the house where he had experienced such dire humiliation a brief half hour ago.

"Keep him in sight, Jan," he commanded, "until he goes to the house of Mynheer

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Hals in the Peuselaarsteg, whither he means to go for supper. There you may safely leave him for an hour, and go directly to the house of my lord of Heemskerk, whom you know. Ask him for half a dozen of his foreign mercenaries. Tell him they are for my immediate service. These men will then help you to keep our knave in sight.

"He will leave Haarlem at moonrise and you must never lose his track for a moment. Presently he should be escorting a lady in the direction of Rotterdam. If he does this —if he travels south toward that city, do not molest him; only keep him in sight, and the moment he arrives at Rotterdam come and report to me at Ryswick.

"But," he added more emphatically, "if at any time it appears to you that he is turning back with the lady toward Haarlem, come upon him at once with your men and seize him, together with any companions he may have with him. You understand?"

"Perfectly, my lord."

"The lady you will treat with the utmost respect," resumed Stoutenburg with an approving nod. "The rascal and his companions you may mishandle as much as you like, without, however, doing them mortal injury. But having taken the whole party prisoner, you will forthwith convey them to our headquarters, the mill at Ryswick, where you will find me. Now is all that clear?"

"Nothing could be clearer, my lord," repeated Jan firmly.

A few moments later Beresteyn and Stoutenburg had disappeared in the darkness of the narrow street and Jan remained alone at his post of observation.

CHAPTER XXV

BACK TO HOUDEKERK

AND now, after a short rest, back once more in the kingdom of the night and of the frost, of the darkness and of silence, back along the ice ways on a swift and uninterrupted flight.

For the first half hour, while the moon was still very brilliant and the night air very still, it seemed to Diogenes as if the loneliness around him was only fictitious, as if somewhere—far away, mayhap—men moved in the same way as he did, swiftly and silently over the surface of the ice. It seemed to him, in fact, that he was being followed.

He tried to make sure of this, straining his ears to listen. Now and then he caught very distinctly the metallic click of several pairs of skates. His senses, trained to overacuteness through years of hard fighting and of campaigning, could not easily be deceived; and presently there was no doubt in his mind that Nicolaes Beresteyn or the Lord of Stoutenburg had set spies upon his track.

This knowledge caused him only to set his teeth and to strike out more vigorously and more rapidly than before. Those who followed him were fairly numerous—over half a dozen, he reckoned. The only chance of evading them was, therefore, in flight.

He took to noting the rolling banks of cloud with a more satisfied eye, and when, after the first hour or so, the light of the waning moon became more dim and even at times disappeared completely, he took the first opportunity that presented itself of making a détour over a backwater of the Meer, which he knew must bewilder his pursuers.

Whether the pursuit was continued after that he could not say. His eyes, trying to pierce the gloom, could tell him nothing; but there were many intricate little byways just south of the Meer, over backwaters and natural canals, which he knew well; and over these he started on an eccentric and puzzling career which was bound to baffle the spies on his track.

Whenever he spoke subsequently of the many adventures which befell him during the first days of this memorable New Year, he never was very explicit on the subject of this night's run back to Houdekerk.

As soon as he had rid himself—as he thought—of his pursuers, he allowed his mind to become more and more absorbed in the great problem which confronted him since he had pledged his word to Mynheer Beresteyn to bring the jongejuffrouw safely back.

He now moved more mechanically over the iceways, taking no account of time or space or distance, only noting with the mere eyes of instinct the various landmarks which loomed up from time to time out of the fast-gathering darkness.

This coming darkness he welcomed, for he knew his way well, and it would prove his stanch ally against pursuit. For the rest he was conscious neither of cold, of hunger nor of fatigue.

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Pleasant thoughts helped to cheer his spirits and to give strength to his limbs. His brief visit to Haarlem had indeed been fruitful of experiences. A problem confronted him which he had made up his mind to solve during his progress across the ice in the night—how to keep his word to Nicolaes Beresteyn, and yet bring the jongejuffrouw safely back to her father.

She would not of course willingly follow him, and his would once again be the uncongenial task of carrying her off by force if he was to succeed in his new venture.

For the first time now he realized the utter pathos of her helplessness. The proud little vixen, as he had dubbed her a while ago, was after all but a poor defenseless girl tossed hither and thither just to suit the ambitions of men.

Did she really love that unscrupulous and cruel Stoutenburg? he wondered. Surely she must love him, for she did not seem the kind of woman who would plight her troth against her will. She loved him and would marry him. Her small white hand, which had the subtle fragrance of tulips, would be placed in one which was deeply stained with blood.

Poor young vixen with the sharp tongue that knew how to hurt and the blue eyes that could probe a wound like steel! It was strange to think that their soft glances were reserved for a man whose heart was more filled with hate for men than with love for one woman.

"If I loved you, little vixen," he once murmured, apostrophizing the elusive vision which lightened the darkness around him, "if I loved you, I would break my word to that dastard who is your brother. I would not take you to Rotterdam to further his ambition, but I would carry you off to please myself. I would take you to some distant land, mayhap to my unknown father's home in England, where the sounds of strife and hatred among men would come only as a faint and intangible echo.

"I would take you where roses bloom in profusion, and where in the Spring the petals of apple blossoms would cover you like a mantle of fragrant snow. There I would teach that sharp tongue of yours to murmur words of tenderness and those perfect blue eyes to close in the ecstasy of a kiss.

"But," he added with his habitual lighthearted laugh, "I do not love you, little vixen; for heigh-ho! If I did 'twere hard for my peace of mind."

WHEN Diogenes neared the town of Leyden he heard its church clocks ring out the hour of three. Close by the city walls he took off his skates, preferring to walk the short league which lay between him and Houdekerk.

He was more tired than he cared to own even to himself, and the last tramp along the road was inexpressibly wearisome. But he had seen or heard nothing more of his pursuers. He was quite convinced that they had lost track of him some hours ago.

At last in the near distance a number of tiny lights proclaimed the presence of a group of windmills. It was in one of these that Pythagoras and Socrates, his assistants in the abduction of Gilda, had been ordered to ask for shelter—in the fifth one down the road, which stood somewhat isolated from the others. Even now its long, weird arms showed like heavy lines of ink upon the black background of the sky.

Diogenes almost fell up against the door; he could hardly stand. But the miller was on the lookout for him, having slept with only half an eye, waiting for the stranger whose emissaries had already paid him well.

Like all his compeers in the neighborhood, he found but scanty living in the grinding of corn for the neighboring peasantry; there was too much competition nowadays, and work had not increased in proportion.

Diogenes had made previous acquaintance with his present landlord. He knew him to be a man of discretion and of boundless cupidity—two very useful qualities when there is a secret to be kept and plenty of money wherewith to guard it.

THEREFORE did Diogenes order his companions to convey the jongejuffrouw to the mill of Mynheer Patz, and there to keep guard over her until his own return.

Patz looked well after his belated guest's material comfort. There were some bread and cheese and a large mug of ale waiting for him in the wheelhouse and a clean straw pallet in a corner. The place smelled sweetly of freshly ground corn, of flour and of dry barley; and a thin white coating of flour, soft to the touch as velvet, lay over everything.

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He dreamed of Gilda all night. Her voice rang in his ear right through the soughing of the wind which beat against the ill fitting windows of the wheelhouse. Alternately in his dream she reviled him, pleaded with him, heaped insults upon him. But he was securely bound and gagged and could not reply to her insults or repulse her pleadings. He made frantic efforts to tear the gag from his mouth, for he wished to tell her that he had not lost his heart to her and cared nothing for the misery which she felt.

CHAPTER XXVI

THENCE TO ROTTERDAM

HE CAUGHT sight of the jongejuffrouw later on in the morning, when she came out of the mill and stepped into the sledge which stood waiting for her at the door.

The thaw had not been sufficiently heavy, nor had it lasted a sufficient number of hours, to make a deep impression on the thick covering of snow which still lay over the roads. The best and quickest mode of traveling, at any rate for the next few hours, would still be by sledge. The intervening half dozen leagues that lay between Houdekerk and Rotterdam could be easily covered in the day, provided an early start was made and no long halts allowed for meals.

Diogenes had made arrangements for the start to be made by seven o'clock. A dull light of pale, rosy gray hung over the snow-covered landscape, and far away on the horizon line that same rose-gray light was just assuming a more brilliant hue. He sent Mevrouw Patz up to the jongejuffrouw to acquaint her with the plans for the day, and to beg her to give these her approval.

Mevrouw Patz returned with the message that the jongejuffrouw was ready to start at any hour which mynheer would command, and was otherwise prepared to obey him in all things.

So Diogenes, standing well out of sight, watched Gilda as she came out of the door of the mill and remained for one moment quite still, waiting for the sledge to draw up. She looked fragile this morning, he thought, and her face looked tiny and very pale within the soft frame of the fur hood which covered her head.

For a second or two it seemed to him as if she was looking around somewhat anxiously, with a frown upon her smooth forehead, puzzled and almost frightened—as if she expected and at the same time feared to see some one or something.

The next second the cloud appeared to lift from her face, and Diogenes even thought—but in this he may have been mistaken—that a sigh of relief escaped her lips.

After that she stepped into the sledge, closely followed by Maria.

Pythagoras and Socrates had been well drilled in their duties toward the jongejuffrouw and Diogenes noted with satisfaction that his brother philosophers did their best to make the lady as comfortable as possible with a pillow or two bought at Leyden the day previously and the warm rugs from Haarlem, which they wrapped carefully around her feet. Maria, dignified and unbending, did her best to prevent those rascals from doing their duty in this manner, but soon her own wants got the better of her pride, and shivering with cold she was glad enough to allow Pythagoras to roll a thick horse blanket about her knees.

A few moments later a start was made, to the accompaniment of lusty cheering from the miller and his wife, both of whom were pleasant, even obsequious, to the last.

The stolid peasant who held the reins urged his horses on to a brisk trot as soon as they had reached the flat open road. The three philosophers rode at some little distance behind the sledge, ready to push forward if some marauder or footpad showed signs of molesting the sledge.

Diogenes caught only a few brief glimpses of the jongejuffrouw during the day: once at Zegwaard, where there was a halt for dinner; then at Zevenhuisen and Hillegersberg, where horses and men were ready for a rest. But she never seemed to see him, passing quickly in and out of the small huts or cottages to which Pythagoras or Socrates escorted her from a respectful distance. She never spoke to either of these worthies on those occasions, nor did she question any orders for halting or restarting.

To those who attended on her, however, at the halting-places, to the cottagers or millers who brought her milk and bread to eat, she was graciousness itself; and whenever it was time to go Diogenes before leaving had invariably to listen to the loud praises of the beautiful jongejuffrouw with the sweet, sad face.

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As to his own existence, she seemed hardly aware of it. At Zevenhuisen, when she went back to the sledge, Diogenes was not very far from where she passed. Moreover, he was quite sure that she had seen him, for her head was turned straight in the direction where he stood, hat in hand, waiting to see her comfortably settled in the sledge before remounting.

It was in the early part of the afternoon and once more bitterly cold. No doubt she felt the return of the frost, for she seemed to give a little shiver and pulled the hood more closely over her face.

The roads had been very heavy earlier in the day with their carpet of partially melted snow, but now this surface had frozen once more and the track was slippery like glass under the sledge, terribly trying for the horses.

Progress was necessarily slow and wearisome to both man and beast; and the shades of evening were beginning to gather in very fast when at last the wooden spire of Rotterdam's Groote Kerk emerged out of the frozen mist.

DIOGENES, as he had done before at Leyden and at Zeegwaard, pushed on ahead now. He wanted to reach the house of Ben Isaje in advance of the jongejuffrouw and prepare that gentleman against her coming.

Ben Isaje appeared to be a person of some consequence in Rotterdam, for the moment he questioned a passser-by as to where the mynheer resided, there were plenty of willing tongues ready to give him information.

Having followed accurately the instructions which were given to him, Diogenes found himself presently at the top of a street which was so narrow that he reckoned, if he stretched out his legs, his feet would be knocking against opposite walls. Anyhow, it looked almost impassable for a rider. He peered down it somewhat dubiously. It was very badly lighted. Two feeble lamps alone glimmered at each end of it, and not a soul was in sight.

Close to where his horse was standing at the corner of that same street the word "*Tapperij*," writ in bold letters and well lit by a lamp placed conveniently above it, invited the tired wayfarer to enter. This philosopher was not the man to refuse so insinuating an invitation. He dismounted, and leaving his horse in charge of a hostler he entered the tap room of the tiny hostel; where, being both tired and thirsty, he refreshed himself with a draft of good Rhine wine.

After which he collected more information about the house of Mynheer Ben Isaje. It was situate about midway down that narrow street, around the corner, and was easily distinguishable through its crooked and wobegone appearance and the closely shuttered projecting window on the ground floor.

A very few minutes later Diogenes had identified the house from the several descriptions which had been given him. Ben Isaje's abode proved to be a tiny shop with a tall, pointed gable sitting above it like a sugarloaf hat. Its low casement window was securely barred with stout wooden shutters, held in place by thick iron bars.

The upper part of the house seemed to be at perpetual enmity with the lower; for it did not sit straight, or even securely, above the humble ground floor below. The upper floor, moreover, projected a good three feet over the front door and the shop window, while the single gable sat askew over the lot.

As there was no knocker and he never carried a riding-whip, he gave the substantial oak panel a vigorous kick with his boot.

SOON he heard a soft grating behind the judas, and felt, more than saw, that a pair of eyes were peering at him from within.

"Open, Mynheer Ben Isaje," he cried loudly and peremptorily, "ere I rouse this entire evil-smelling neighborhood with my calls. Open, I tell you, ere I break in your door first and your nose afterward."

"'Tis too late to transact business now," came in a feeble, high-pitched voice from behind the narrow judas. "Too late and too dark. The shop is closed."

"'Tis not with your shop that I have to do, master," quoth Diogenes impatiently, "but with yourself, if indeed you are Mynheer Ben Isaje, as I gravely suspect that you are."

"What do you want with Ben Isaje?" queried the timorous voice. "He hath gone home for the night. His house is situate——"

"His house shall be *verdommt* if you parley any longer behind that grating, man; aye, and this shop, too, for if you do not

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open that door immediately I will break the windows. My business brooks no delay, and I must needs get into this house as best I can."

But despite this threat no attempt was made to draw the bolts from within; whereupon Diogenes, whose stock of patience was never inexhaustible, and who, moreover, wished to give value to his threats, took a step backward and then with a sudden spring threw his whole weight against the oak door; a proceeding which caused the tumbledown house to shake upon its foundations.

The next moment the timorous voice was once more raised behind the judas:

"Kindly have patience, gentle sir. I was even now about to open."

Diogenes heard the drawing of more than one heavy bolt, then the grinding of a key in the lock; after which the door was partially opened, and a thin face with hooked nose and sunken cheeks appeared in the aperture.

To imagine that any man could hold a door against Diogenes when he desired to pass through it was to be totally unacquainted with that philosopher. He certainly would have smashed in the door of Ben Isaje's abode with his powerful shoulders had it been kept persistently closed against him; but as it was, he only gave it a push with his big knee, flinging it wide open thereby, and then stepped coolly into the narrow, ill lighted passage.

There was a blank wall on each side of him, and a door lower down on the left. Straight ahead a narrow, ladder-like staircase was half lost in the gloom.

The anxious janitor had hastily retreated down the dark passage at sight of the towering figure which now confronted him. In his fright he must have dropped the lanthorn which, apparently, he had been carrying, for there it lay on the floor, fortunately still alight. So Diogenes picked it up and, holding it high above his head, he took a closer survey of the man.

"You are Ben Isaje," he said calmly, as he held the light close to the man's face and then let it travel over his spare and shrinking form. "Your dress and appearance proclaim your race. Then pray tell me what was the use of making such a to-do, seeing that I had business with you and therefore meant to come in? Now take this lanthorn and lock your front door again, after which you had best conduct me to a room where I can talk privately with you."

No doubt there was something in the stranger's face and attitude which reassured Mynheer Ben Isaje; for, after a few more seconds of anxious hesitancy, he did take the lanthorn from Diogenes's hand and shuffled back to the street door, which he once more carefully barred and bolted.

After which, with the aid of one of the many large keys which hung by a steel chain in a bunch from his waist, he unlocked the door in the passage; and standing a little to one side he bade his belated guest walk in.

CHAPTER XXVII

CHECK

THE room into which Diogenes now stepped appeared at first sight to be almost devoid of furniture. It was only when Ben Isaje had entered and placed the lanthorn down upon a wooden table at one end of the room that the philosopher realized where he was.

The dark, low walls showed themselves lined with solid oak chests and presses, each with massive hinges and locks—rusty and covered with dust, but firm enough to withstand for many an hour the depredations of thieves. Ben Isaje was obviously a jeweler by trade, and this was the shop where he kept his precious goods. No wonder, then, that he looked with obvious fear on his belated visitor with the powerful shoulders and vigorous limbs, seeing that to all appearances he was at the moment alone in the house.

Like all jewelers settled in the Dutch cities at this time, Ben Isaje carried on a number of other trades, some of which were perhaps not altogether avowable. He acted as banker and money lender and general go-between in financial transactions, some of which had political aims. Discretion was of necessity his chief stock in trade. His small cargo of scruples he had thrown overboard long ago.

He was as ready now to finance a conspiracy against the Stadtholder as against the Archduchess or Don John, provided he saw huge monetary profits in the deal, and received bribes with a calm conscience from both Maurice of Nassau and the Lord of Stoutenburg. But once he was liberally paid he would hold to his bond; it was only by

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keeping the good graces of all political parties that he remained free from molestation.

Diogenes had known exactly what to expect when Nicolaes Beresteyn gave him the letter and bond to present to Ben Isaje. He was therefore not surprised in the least when he saw before him the true type of financial agent whom he had already met more than once in his life before.

Ben Isaje, who was the depositee of vast sums of money placed in his house by clients of substance and of note, wore a long, greasy caftan of black cloth, which was worn threadbare at the elbows and the knees. The shop wherein he transacted business, both for Governments and private individuals, that ofttimes involved several million guilders, had only a few very rickety chairs, one or two tables, blackened with dirt and age, and a piece of tattered carpet in one corner as sole expressions of comfort.

But all these facts were of course none of Diogenes's business. At his host's invitation he sat down on one of the rickety chairs, and proceeded to extract some papers from the inner lining of his doublet.

"It would save time," he began dryly, seeing that the man still eyed him with suspicion, "if you would cease to deny that you are Ben Isaje, jeweler of Rotterdam. I have here some papers which I must deliver into the said Ben Isaje's own hands. They are writ by Mynheer Nicolaes Beresteyn of Haarlem, and do explain the purport of my visit here."

"From Nicolaes Beresteyn," quoth the other, with an obvious sigh of relief. "Why did you not name him before, sir? I am always at Mynheer Nicolaes Beresteyn's commands. Indeed my name is Ben Isaje. If you have cause to doubt it, sir——"

"*Donderstеen!* But I never did doubt it, man, from the moment I saw the end of your nose through the aperture of your door. So no more talk now, I pray you. Time is getting on. Here is the letter which Mynheer Beresteyn bade me present to you."

He handed over to Ben Isaje the letter which was writ in Beresteyn's own hand and duly signed with his own name. Ben Isaje took it and drawing a chair close to the light on the table he unfolded the paper and began to read.

Diogenes the while examined him attentively. He was the man who after this night would have charge of Gilda, at the bidding of her own brother. He—Diogenes—would after this night become a free agent; his pledge to Beresteyn would be redeemed, and he would be free, in an hour's time mayhap, to work for his own ends—to restore the jongejuffrouw to her sorrowing father, by taking her by force from the old banker's keeping and returning with utmost speed and in utmost secrecy the very way he had just come. A fortune of five hundred thousand guilders awaited him in Haarlem, provided he could cajole or threaten Gilda into keeping his share of her original abduction a secret for all time.

How this could be done he had not yet thought on; but that it could be done he had no manner of doubt. An interview with the lady, either this night or on the morrow, a promise to take her back to her father at once if she swore a solemn oath never to betray him, and he might be back in Leyden with her tomorrow eve and in possession of a fortune the following day.

No wonder, then, that with these happy thoughts whirling in his head he could scarcely restrain his temper while Ben Isaje read the long letter through and then reread it.

"HAVE you not finished, sir?" he exclaimed at last, with marked impatience. "Meseems the letter is explicit enough."

"Quite explicit, sir, I thank you," replied Ben Isaje, as he slowly folded up the letter and slipped it into the pocket of his caftan. "I am to assure myself that the jongejuffrouw Gilda Beresteyn, who is in your charge, is safe and well, and hath no grave complaints to make against you, beyond that you did seize her by force in the streets of Haarlem. After which I am to see that she is conveyed with respect and safety to my own private house, which is situated outside this city, or to any other place which I might think fitting, and there to keep her in comfort until such time as Mynheer Beresteyn desires.

"All that is quite clearly set forth in the letter, sir, and also that in payment of your services you are to receive the sum of three thousand guilders, which I am to give you in exchange for the formal bond which you will duly present."

The banker spoke very deliberately—too deliberately, in fact, for Diogones's endurance. Now he broke in impatiently.

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"Is that all that is set forth in the letter?"

The banker smiled somewhat sardonically.

"Not quite all," he said. "There is, of course, question in it of payment to myself."

"And certain conditions, too, I imagine, attached to such payment. I know that Mynheer Nicolaes Beresteyn is prudent beyond his years."

"There is but one condition, sir. He enjoins me to keep a watchful eye on the jongejuffrouw once she is under my roof; to set a watch over her and her movements, and never if possible to let her out of my sight. He suggests that she might at any time make an attempt at escape, which he strictly commands me to frustrate, and in point of fact he desires me to look upon his sister as a prisoner of war, not even to be let out on parole."

Diogenes's low, prolonged whistle was his only comment on what he had just heard.

"Mynheer Beresteyn also suggests to me, sir," continued Ben Isaje with marked affability, "the advisability of keeping a watchful eye over you until such time as the jongejuffrouw is safely housed under my roof."

"You will find that injunction somewhat more difficult to follow, my friend, than you imagine," retorted Diogenes with a ringing laugh. "If you'll take my advice you will have extra watchmen posted outside your door."

"I have valuable things as well as money stored in this house, sir," rejoined the Jew simply. "I have a picked guard of ten men sleeping here every night, and two watchmen outside my door until dawn."

Once more a long, low whistle escaped from the philosopher's lips.

"You are careful, my friend!" he said lightly.

"One has to be careful, sir, against thieves and housebreakers."

"And will your picked guard of ten men escort the jongejuffrouw to your private house this night?"

But the other slowly shook his head in response.

"The lady and her escort," he said, "must, I fear me, accept the hospitality of this hovel for tonight."

"But——"

"My wife is away, sir, visiting her father in Dordrecht. She will only be home tomorrow. In the meanwhile my house is empty and I am spending my nights here as well as my days."

"But——"

"It will not be a great hardship for the jongejuffrouw, sir," broke in the Jew again. "She will be made as comfortable for the night as may be—she and her attendant too. I have a serving-woman here who will see to the beds and the supper. Then tomorrow I can send a messenger to my private house to prepare my wife, the moment she arrives, against the coming of the jongejuffrouw. 'Tis situate but half a league from here, and she would then be sure of a welcome equal to her worth."

Then, as Diogenes was silent—since he felt perplexed and anxious at this unlooked-for turn of events and this first check to his plans—Ben Isaje continued with even greater affability than heretofore:

"Indeed, sir, and is it not better for the lady's own comfort? She will be overfatigued when she arrives, and delighted, I know, at finding a nice bed and supper ready for her. Is it not all for the best?" he reiterated pleasantly.

BUT Diogenes was not satisfied. He did not like the idea of losing sight of Gilda altogether quite so soon. "I do not care to leave the jongejuffrouw," he said, "until I see her safely on her way to your house."

"Nor need you leave her, sir. There is a small room at the back of this shop to which you are heartily welcome for the night. It is usually occupied by some of my guard, but they can dispose themselves in other rooms in the house.

"They are sturdy fellows, sir, and well armed," continued Ben Isaje, not without significance, "and I trust that they will not disturb you with their noise. Otherwise, sir, you are most welcome to sleep and sup under this roof."

Diogenes murmured vague thanks. Indeed, he was not a little troubled in his mind. The plans which he had formed for the second abduction of Gilda would prove more difficult of execution than he had supposed. Ben Isaje had more than the customary prudence of his race, and Beresteyn had made that prudence and the measures which it suggested a condition of payment.

Between the prudence of Beresteyn and that of Ben Isaje, it was difficult to see how

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an adventurous plan could succeed. Three philosophers against a picked guard of ten men, with two more to keep watch outside the door, did not seem a promising venture.

But Diogenes would not have been the happy-go-lucky soldier of fortune that he was had he paused for long at this juncture in order to brood over likely failure, or had he not been willing to allow Chance a goodly share in the working-out of his destiny.

It certainly was useless to argue any of these matters further with Ben Isaje. Fate had willed that the philosopher should spend this night under the same roof as the jongejuffrouw, with a watch of twelve picked men—not counting Ben Isaje himself—set over him, and to rebel against that fate now were puerile and useless.

So he murmured more audible thanks for the proffered hospitality and put on as good-humored an air over the matter as he could.

From the distance now there came the sound of jingling bells and the clatter of horses' hoofs upon the cobblestones of the streets.

"'Tis the jongejuffrouw," exclaimed Diogenes, springing to his feet.

"The sledge can not turn into this narrow way," rejoined Ben Isaje. "Will you go meet the lady, sir, at the top of the street where she must needs dismount, and escort her hither, while I go to give orders to the serving-woman?

"Your men," he added, as Diogenes at once arose and went to the door, "and the horses can put up at the hostelry close by, where no doubt they have halted even now."

But already Diogenes was half way down the passage. Soon he was at the front door fumbling in the dark for the heavy bolts. Ben Isaje followed him more deliberately, lanthorn in hand. He unlocked the door, and the mext moment Diogenes was once more out in the street, walking rapidly in the direction whence came the occasional pleasing sound of the tinkling of sleigh bells.

CHAPTER XXVIII

CHECK AGAIN

THOUGH the jongejuffrouw seemed inexpressibly tired and weak, her attitude toward Diogenes lost nothing of its cold aloofness. She was peeping out under the hood of the sledge when he approached it, and at sight of him she immediately drew in her head.

"Will you deign to descend, mejuffrouw?" he said, with that slight tone of good-humored mockery in his voice which had the power to irritate her. "Mynheer Ben Isaje, whose hospitality you will enjoy this night, lives some way up this narrow, insalubrious street, and he has bidden me to escort you to his house."

Silently, and with a great show of passive obedience, Gilda made ready to step out of the sledge.

"Come, Maria," she said curtly.

"The road is very slippery, mejuffrouw," he added warningly. "Will you permit me, for your own convenience' sake, to carry you as far as Ben Isaje's door?"

"It would not be for my convenience, sir," she retorted haughtily. "If you are so chivalrously inclined, perhaps you would kindly convey my waiting-woman thither in your arms."

"At your service, mejuffrouw," he said, with imperturbable good temper.

And without more ado, despite her screams and her struggles, he seized Maria around her ample waist and around her struggling knees at the moment when she was stepping out of the sledge in the wake of her mistress.

The lamp outside the hostel at the corner illumined for a moment Gilda's pale, wearied face, and Diogenes saw that she was trying her best to suppress an insistent outburst of laughter.

"Hey there!" he shouted. "Pythagoras, Socrates, follow the jongejuffrouw at a respectful distance and see that no harm come to her while I lead the way with this featherweight in my arms."

Nor did he deposit Maria to the ground until he reached the door of Ben Isaje's house. Here, when the mevrouw began to belabor him with her tongue and with her fists, he turned appealingly to Gilda.

"Mejuffrouw," he said merrily, "is this abuse not unmerited? I did but obey your behests, and see how I must suffer for mine obedience."

But Gilda vouchsafed him no reply, and in the darkness he could not see if her face looked angered or smiling.

Ben Isaje, hearing the noise that went on outside his house, had already hastened to open the door. He welcomed the jongejuffrouw with obsequious bows. Behind him

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in the dark passage stood a lean and tousled-looking serving-woman of uncertain years who was as obsequious as her master.

When Gilda, confused and wearied and mayhap not a little tired, advanced timorously into the narrow passage, the woman rushed up to her and almost kneeling on the floor in the lowliness of her attitude, she kissed the jongejuffrouw's hand.

Diogenes saw nothing more of Gilda and Maria after that. They vanished into the gloom up the ladder-like staircase, preceded by the tousled but amiable woman, who by her talk and clumsy attempts at service had already earned Maria's contempt.

"You too must be hungry, sir," murmured a smooth, affable voice close to Diogenes's elbow. "There is a bite and a drink ready for you. Will you sup, sir, ere you go to bed?"

But before following Ben Isaje into the shop Diogenes exchanged a few words with his brother philosophers, who, impassive and unquestioning, had escorted the jongejuffrouw to the door and now stood there awaiting further orders. Diogenes suggested their getting supper and a bed in the hostelry at the top of the street in company with their driver. The horses, too, were all to be stabled there.

"I am going to spend the night under this tumbledown roof," he said. "But remember to sleep with one eye open, and be prepared for a summons from me at any hour of the night or morning. Until that comes, however, do not leave the hostel.

"Care well for the horses. We may have need of them tomorrow. Good night! Pleasant dreams! Do not forget that tomorrow five hundred guilders will fill each of your pockets. Meanwhile, here is the wherewithal to pay for bed and supper."

He gave them some money and then watched the two quaint figures, the long one and the round one, until they were merged in the blackness of the narrow street. Then he went within. Ben Isaje once more closed and bolted the front door and the two men then went together into the shop.

HERE an appetizing supper had been laid ready upon the table, and a couple of tallow candles burned in pewter sconces. Ben Isaje at once invited his guest to eat and drink.

"Not before we have settled our business together, master," said the latter as he dragged a chair toward the other. Sitting astride upon it, with his shapely legs thrust well out before him, he once more drew a paper from the lining of his doublet.

"You are satisfied," he resumed after a slight pause, "that the lady whom I have had the honor to bring into your house is indeed the Jongejuffrouw Gilda Beresteyn, sister of your client Mynheer Nicolaes Beresteyn of Haarlem?"

"I am quite satisfied on that point," replied the banker, whose thin, bent form under the rigid folds of the black caftan looked curiously weird in the feeble, yellow light. His face was narrow and almost waxlike in hue.

"Then," said Diogenes blandly, while he held out a folded paper to Ben Isaje, "here is the bond signed by Mynheer Beresteyn wherein he orders you to pay me the sum of three thousand guilders in consideration of the services which I have rendered him."

But Ben Isaje did not take the paper thus held out to him.

"It is too late," he said quietly, "to transact business tonight."

"Too late!" exclaimed Diogenes with a blunt oath. "What in thunder do you mean?"

"I mean, sir, that you must try and curb your natural impatience until tomorrow."

"But I will not curb mine impatience another moment, *plepshurk*," cried the philosopher in a rage. "I have fulfilled my share of a bargain; 'tis only a *verdommte Keerl* who would shirk paying his own share on the nail."

"Nor would Mynheer Beresteyn desire me to shirk his responsibilities, I assure you," rejoined the banker suavely. "And believe me, sir, that you will not lose one groat by waiting until the morrow. Let a good supper and a comfortable bed freely offered you atone for this unimportant delay. You still hold Mynheer Beresteyn's bond. Tomorrow at the first business hour you shall be paid."

"But why any delay at all?" thundered Diogenes, who indeed misliked this way of doing business. "Why not pay me the money now, at once? I will gladly forego the supper and sit all night upon your doorstep, if I but have my money in my pocket."

"Unfortunately, sir," said Ben Isaje with imperturbable amiability, "I am quite helpless in the matter. I am not the sole

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master of this business; my wife's brother shares my profits and my obligations. Neither of us is at liberty to pay out a large sum of money save in the presence of the other."

"You and your partner know how to trust one another," said Diogenes with a laugh.

Ben Isaje made no comment on this. He only shrugged his shoulders in that calm manner, peculiar to his race, that suggests the Oriental resignation to compelling Fate.

Diogenes, inwardly fuming, thought over the matter very quietly for a few moments. It was obviously as useless to argue this matter out with Ben Isaje as it had been to combat his dictum anent the jongejuffrouw's spending the night under this roof. As usual, the wholesome lesson of life which the philosopher had learned so thoroughly during his adventurous career stood him in good stead now—the lesson which taught him never to waste time, temper or words over a purposeless argument.

That one shrug of Isaje's shoulders had told him with dumb eloquence that no amount of persuasion on his part would cause the banker to swerve from his determination. The money would be forthcoming on the morrow, but not before, and there were ten picked men somewhere in the house at the present moment to prevent Diogenes from settling this matter in a primitive and efficient way by using his fists.

So in this instance, too, disappointed though he was, he quickly regained his good humor. After all, Ben Isaje was right; a night's delay would not spell a loss, and was well compensated for by a good supper and cozy bed.

With his habitual light-hearted laugh and careless shrug of the shoulders, he folded the paper up again and once more slipped it carefully into the inner lining of his doublet.

"You are right, sir," he said. "'Twere foolish to allow choler to spoil the appetite. I am as hungry as the dog of a Spaniard. By your leave I'll test the strength of your ale; and tomorrow, ere I leave your house, you shall pay me over the money in the presence of your trusting brother-in-law.

"Until then the bond remains with me, and I hold myself responsible for the safety of the jongejuffrouw. So I pray you be not surprised if I forbid her removal from this house until after I have exchanged this bond for the sum of three thousand guilders."

After which he drew his chair close to the table and fell to all its good cheer with a hearty will. Ben Isaje, hospitable and affable to the last, waited on him with his own hands.

CHAPTER XXIX

A NOCTURNE

IT WAS only natural that, tired though he was and enjoying an unusually contented mind, Diogenes was nevertheless unable to get to sleep.

He had had a very good supper and had parted at an early hour from his host. Ben Isaje had been amiable, even deferential, to the last; indeed, there had been nothing in the Jew's demeanor to arouse misgivings in the most suspicious mind.

The lean and tousled serving-woman had prepared a clean and comfortable bed in the narrow alcove within the wall-paneling of the small room which adjoined the shop, but though the weary philosopher wooed sleep with utmost persistence, it resolutely refused to be lured to his pillow. At first the arrival of the night watchmen had kept him awake; for they made their entrance with much jingling of swords and loud and lusty talk. There was apparently a good solid partition between his room and the shop, for as soon as the watchmen were settled at their post only their voices reached Diogenes's ear and then like a muffled murmur.

A door gave from his room on the passage. This he had carefully locked, but it hung loosely on its hinges, and the slightest noise in the house—a heavy footfall overhead or in the shop—would cause it to rattle with a weird, intermittent sound which sent sleep flying baffled away.

There were thoughts, too, which crowded in upon him—pleasant thoughts as well as others that were a trifle sad. The immediate future with its promise of a possible fortune loomed brightly enough, but the means to that happy end was vaguely disturbing the light-hearted equanimity of this soldier of fortune, accustomed to grip Chance by the hair whenever she rushed past him in her mad, whirling career, and without heeding those who stood in his way.

But suddenly the whole thing seemed different, and Diogenes himself could not have told you why it was so. Thoughts of the

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future and of the promise which it held disturbed when they should have elated him. There was a feeling in him which he could not analyze, a feeling wherein a strange, sweet compassion seemed to form the main ingredient.

The philosopher who had hitherto viewed life through the rosy glasses of unalterable good humor, who had smiled at good luck and ill luck, laughed at misfortune and at hope, suddenly felt that there was something in life which could not be dismissed light-heartedly, something which really counted, though it was so intangible and so elusive that even now he could not give it a name.

The adventurer who had slept soundly and dreamlessly in camp and on the field, in the streets of a sacked town or the still smoldering battlements of a fortress, could find no rest in the comfortable bed so carefully prepared for him in the house of Ben Isaje. The murmur of voices from the shop, low and monotonous, irritated his nerves; the rattling of the door upon its hinges drove him well nigh distracted.

He heard every noise in the house as they died out one by one—the voice of the serving-woman bidding the jongejuffrouw good night, the shuffling footsteps of old Ben Isaje, the heavy tread of Maria overhead, and another, light and swift, which—strangely enough—disturbed him more than the louder sounds had done.

At last he could stand his present state no longer. He felt an unpleasant tingling to the very tips of his fingers and the very roots in his hair. It seemed to him as if soft, noiseless steps wandered aimlessly outside his door. Furtive, tiny animals with feet of velvet must have run down the stairs and then halted, breathless and terrified, on the other side of those rattling wooden panels.

He sat up in bed and groping for his tinder he struck a light. Then he listened again. Not a sound now stirred inside the house. Only the wind soughed through the loose tiles of the roof and found out the chinks and cracks of the ill fitting window, through which it blew with a sharp, whistling sound. From the shop there came the faint murmur of some of the watchmen snoring at their post.

Beyond that, nothing. And yet Diogenes, whose keen ear was trained to catch the flutter of every twig, the movement of every beast, could have sworn that some one was awake at this moment, in this house, besides himself—some one who breathed and trembled on the other side of the door.

Without a moment's hesitation he slipped on his clothes as quickly as he could. Then he pulled the curtain across in front of the alcove and paused for one second longer in order to listen.

He had certainly not been mistaken. Through the stillness of the house he heard the soughing of the wind, the snoring of the watchmen, and that faint, palpitating sound outside in the passage—that sound which was as the breathing of some living, frightened thing.

Then he walked as noiselessly as he could up to the door, and with a sudden simultaneous turn of key and handle he opened it suddenly.

It opened outward. The passage beyond was pitch dark, but there in front of him now, white as a ghost, white as the garment which she wore, white as the marble statue of the Madonna which he had seen in the cathedral at Prague, stood the jongejuffrouw.

THE candle which she carried flickered in the draft. Thus flickering it lit up her large blue eyes, which she kept fixed upon him with an expression half defiant yet wholly terrified.

Frankly, he thought at first that this was an apparition, a vivid embodiment of the fevered fancies which had been haunting him. No wonder, therefore, that he made no movement toward her, or expressed the slightest astonishment at seeing her there, all alone, in the middle of the night, not five paces away from him.

Thus they stood looking at one another for some time in absolute silence; she obviously very frightened, hesitating betwixt audacity and immediate flight, and he puzzled and with a vague sense of unreality upon him, a sense as of a dream which yet had in it the pulsating vividness of life.

She was the first to break this silence, which was beginning to be oppressive. Gilda Beresteyn was not a timid woman, nor was hers a character which ever vacillated once her mind was made up. The step which she had taken this night, daring and unconventional as it was, had been well thought out, deliberately and seriously.

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She had weighed every danger, every risk which she ran, even those which in her pure-minded innocence she was not able fully to appreciate. Now, though she was scared momentarily, she had no thought of turning back.

The old stiff-necked Dutch haughtiness of hers did not desert her for a moment, even though she was obviously at a disadvantage in this instance, and had come here as a suppliant.

"I wished to speak with you, sir," she said, and her voice had scarce a tremor in it. "My woman was too timorous to come down and summon you to my presence, as I had ordered her to do; so I was forced to come myself."

Though she looked very helpless, very childlike in her innocence, she had contrived to speak to him like a Princess addressing a menial, holding her tiny head very high and making visible efforts to still the quivering of her lips.

There was something so quaint in this proud attitude of hers under the present circumstances, that despite its pathos Diogenes's keen sense of humor was not proof against it, and that accustomed merry smile of his crept slowly over every line of his face.

"I am ever at your service, mejuffrouw," he said as gravely as he could. "Your *majordomo*, your valet—I always await your commands."

"Then I pray you take this candle," she said coldly, "and stand aside that I may enter. What I have to say can not be told in this passage."

He took the candle from her, since she held it out to him, and then stepped aside just as she had commanded, keeping the door wide open for her to pass through into the room. She was holding herself very erect, and with perfect self-possession she now selected a chair whereon to sit. She wore the same white gown which she had on when first he laid hands on her in the streets of Haarlem. The fur cloak wherein she had wrapped herself had partially slid from her shoulders.

Having sat down close to the table, with one white arm resting upon it, she beckoned peremptorily to him to close the door and to put down the candle, all of which he did quite mechanically, for the feeling had come back to him that the white figure before him was only a vision—or mayhap a dream from which, however, he hoped not to awaken too soon.

"At your command, mejuffrouw," was all that he said, and he remained standing quite close to the door, with half the width of the room between himself and her.

But to himself he murmured under his breath—

"St. Bavon and the Holy Virgin, do ye both stand by me now!"

"I do not know, sir," she began after a while, "if my coming here at this hour doth greatly surprise you, but in truth the matter which brings me is so grave that I can not give a thought to your feelings or to mine own."

"And mine, mejuffrouw, are of such little consequence," he said good-humoredly, seeing that she appeared to wait for a reply, "that it were a pity you should waste precious time in considering them."

"Nor have I come to talk of feelings, sir. My purpose is of deadly earnestness. I have come to propose a bargain for your acceptance."

"A bargain?"

"Yes. A bargain," she reiterated. "One I hope and think that you will find it worth your while to accept."

"Then may I crave the honor of hearing the nature of that bargain, mejuffrouw?" he asked pleasantly.

She did not give him an immediate reply, but remained quite still and silent for a minute or even two, looking with wide-open, inquiring eyes on the tall figure of the man who had, to her mind, done her such an infinite wrong.

She noted and acknowledged quite dispassionately the air of splendor which became him so well—splendor of physique, of youth and of strength; and those laughing eyes that questioned and that mocked, the lips that always smiled, and the straight brow with its noble sweep which hid the true secret of his personality. And once again, as on that evening at Leyden, she fell almost to hating him, angered that such a man should be nothing better than a knave, a mercenary rogue, paid to lend a hand in unavowable deeds.

HE STOOD her scrutiny as best he could, answering her look of haughty condescension with one of humble deference; but the smile of gentle irony never left his lips, and tempered the humility of his attitude.

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"You have owned to me, sir," resumed Gilda Beresteyn at last, "that you have been paid for the infamous work which you are doing now—for laying hands on me in the streets of Haarlem and for keeping me a prisoner at the will of your employer. To own to such a trade, sir, is to admit oneself somewhat below the level of honest men. Is that not so?"

"Below the level of most men, mejuffrouw, I admit," he replied imperturbably.

"Had it not been for that admission on your part, I would never have thought of coming to you with a proposal which——"

"Which you never would have put before an honest man," he broke in with perfect equanimity, seeing that she hesitated.

"You anticipate my thought, sir; and I am glad to find that you will make my errand even easier than I had hoped. Briefly, then, let me tell you, as I told you at Leyden, that I know who your paymaster is.

"A man has thought fit to perpetrate a crime against me for a reason which no doubt he deemed expedient and which probably he has not imparted to you. Reasons and causes, I imagine, sir, are no concern of yours. You take payment for your deeds and do not inquire into motives. Is that not so?"

This time Diogenes only made a slight bow in acknowledgment of her question. He was smiling to himself more grimly than was his wont, for he had before him the recollection of the Lord of Stoutenburg, cruel, coarse and evil, bullying and striking a woman; and of Nicolaes Beresteyn, callous and cynical, bartering his sister's honor and safety to insure his own.

To the one she had plighted her troth. The other was her natural protector, dear to her through those sweet bonds of childhood which bind brother and sister in such close affection. Yet both are selfish, unscrupulous rogues, thought the philosopher, though both very dear to her, and both honest men in her sight.

"That being so, sir," she resumed once more, "meseems that you should be equally ready to do me service and to ask me no questions, provided that I pay you well."

"That, mejuffrouw," he said quietly, "would depend on the nature of the service."

"It is quite simple, sir. Let me explain. While my woman and I were having supper upstairs, the wench who served us fell to gossiping, telling us the various news of the day which have filtered through into Rotterdam.

"Among other less important matters, sir, she told us that the Prince of Orange had left his camp at Sprang in order to journey northward to Amsterdam. Yesterday he and his escort of one hundred men-at-arms passed close to this city. They were making for Delft, where the Prince means to spend a day or two before proceeding farther on his journey. He sleeps at the Prinzenhof in Delft this night."

"Yes, mejuffrouw?" he said.

Suddenly her manner had changed. Something of its coldness had gone from it, even if the pride was still there. While she spoke a warm tinge of pink flooded her cheeks. She was leaning forward. Her eyes, bright and glowing, were fixed upon him with a look of eagerness and almost of appeal, and her lips were moist and trembling, whilst the words which she wished to speak seemed to be dying in her throat.

"What hath the progress of the Prince of Orange to do with your most humble and most obedient servant?" he asked again.

"I must speak with the Prince of Orange, sir," she said, while her voice, now soft and mellow, fell almost like a prayer on his ear. "I must go to him to Delft not later than tomorrow. Oh! you will not refuse me this —you can not! I——"

She had clasped her hands together. Her eyes were wet with tears; and as she pleaded she bent forward so low in her chair that it seemed for a moment as if her knees would touch the ground. In the flickering candle light she looked divinely pretty thus, with all the cold air of pride gone from her childlike face.

A gentle draft stirred the nut-brown curls around her head. The fur cloak had completely slipped down from her shoulders and her white dress gave her more than ever the air of that Madonna carved in marble which he had seen once in the cathedral at Prague.

The philosopher passed a decidedly shaking hand across his forehead. The room was beginning to whirl around him, the floor to give way under his feet. He fell to thinking that the mild ale offered to him by Ben Isaje had been more heady than he had thought.

"St. Bavon," he murmured to himself,

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"where in Heaven's name are you now? I asked you to stand by me."

IT WAS one of those moments, perfect in themselves, when a man can forget everything that pertains to the outer world, when neither self-interest nor ordinary prudence will count, when he is ready to jeopardize his life, his career, his future, his very soul for the ecstasy which lies in the one heaven-born minute.

Thus it was with this philosopher, this man of the moment, the adventurer, the soldier of fortune. The world which he had meant to conquer, the fortune which he had vowed to win, seemed to slip absolutely away from him. This dream—for it was after all only a dream; it was too beautiful to be reality—the continuance of this dream seemed to him to be all that mattered. This girl, proud and pleading, a Madonna, a saint, a child of innocence, was the only perfect, desirable entity in this universe.

"St. Bavon, you rogue! You are playing me false!" he murmured, as the last vestige of self-control and of prudence threatened to fall away from him.

"Madonna," he said, as with a quick movement he came forward and bent the knee before her, "I entreat you to believe that whatever lies in my power to do in your service, that will I gladly do. How can I refuse?" he added, whilst that immutable smile, gentle, humorous, faintly ironical, once more lit up his face as he looked straight into hers. "How can I refuse to obey, since you deign to plead to me with those lips? How can I withstand your appeal when it speaks to me through your eyes?"

"You will let me do what I ask?" she exclaimed with a little cry of joy, for his attitude was very humble and his voice yielding and kind. He was kneeling at some little distance from her, which was quite becoming in a mercenary knave.

"If it be in my power, madonna!" he said simply.

"Then will I pay you well," she continued eagerly. "I have thought it all out. I am rich, you know, and my bond is as good as that of any man. Do you but bring me inkhorn and paper. I will give you a bond for four thousand guilders on Mynheer Ben Isaje himself; he hath moneys of mine own in trust and at interest. But if four thousand guilders are not enough, I pray you name your price. It shall be what you ask."

"What do you desire me to do, madonna?"

"I desire you to escort me to Delft so that I may speak with the Prince of Orange."

"The Prince of Orange is well guarded. No stranger is allowed to enter his presence."

"I am not a stranger to him. My father is his friend. A word from me to him, a ring of mine sent in with a request for an audience, and he will not refuse."

"And having entered the presence of the Stadtholder, mejuffrouw, what do you propose to say to him?"

"That, sir, is naught to you," she retorted coldly.

"I pray you forgive me," he said, still humbly kneeling; "but you have deigned to ask my help, and I'll not give it unless you will tell me what your purpose is."

"You would not dare——"

"To make conditions for my services?" he said, speaking always with utmost deference. "This do I dare, mejuffrouw, and my condition is for your acceptance or refusal, as you command."

"I did not ask for your help, sir," she said curtly. "I offered to pay you for certain services I desire you to render me."

Already her look of pleading had gone. She had straightened herself up, prouder and more disdainful than before. He dared to make conditions—he! The mercenary creature whom any one could buy, body and soul, for money, who took payment for doing such work as would soil an honest man's hands!

It was monstrous, impossible, unthinkable! She thought that her ears had deceived her or that mayhap he had misunderstood.

In a moment, at her words, at the scornful glance which accompanied them, he had risen to his feet. The subtle moment had gone by. The air was no longer oppressive, and the ground felt quite steady under him. Calm, smiling, good-tempered, he straightened out his massive figure as if to prepare himself for those shafts which her cruel little tongue knew so well how to deal.

And inwardly he offered up a thanksgiving to St. Bavon for this cold douche upon his flaming temper.

"I did not misunderstand you, mejuffrouw," he said lightly, "and I am ready to

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do you service—under a certain condition."

She bit her lip with vexation. The miserable wretch was obviously not satisfied with the amount which she had named as payment for his services, and he played some weak part of chivalry and of honor in order to make his work appear more difficult and to extract a more substantial reward from her. She tried to put into the glance which she now threw on him all the contempt which she felt and which truly nauseated her at this moment.

Unfortunately she had need of him. She could not start for Delft alone; marauders and footpads would stop her from ever reaching that city. Could she have gone alone, she were not here now, craving the help of a man whom she despised.

"MESEEMS," she said coldly after a slight pause, "that you do wilfully misunderstand our mutual positions. I am not asking you to do anything which could offend your strangely susceptible honor, whose vagaries, I own, I am unable to follow.

"Will ten thousand guilders satisfy your erratic conscience? Or did you receive more than that for laying hands on two helpless women and dragging one—who has never done you any wrong—to a depth of shame and sorrow which you can not possibly fathom?"

"My conscience, mejuffrouw," he replied, seemingly quite unperturbed at her contemptuous glance and insulting speech, "is, as you say, somewhat erratic. For the moment it refuses to consider the possibility of escorting you to Delft unless I know what it is that you desire to say to the Prince of Orange."

"If it is a question of price——"

"It is not a question of price, mejuffrouw," he broke in firmly. "Let us, if you will allow it, call it a question of mine erratic conscience."

"I am rich, sir. My private fortune——"

"Do not name it, mejuffrouw," he said jovially. "The sound of it would stagger a poor man who has to scrape up a living as best he can."

"Forty thousand guilders, sir," she said, pleading once more eagerly, "if you will take me to Delft tomorrow."

"Were it ten hundred thousand, mejuffrouw, I would not do it unless I knew what you wished to say to the Stadtholder."

"Sir, can I not move you?" she implored. "This means more to me than I can hope to tell you."

Once again her pride had given way before this new and awful fear that her errand would be in vain, that she had come here as a suppliant before this rogue, that she had humbled her dignity, entreated him, almost knelt to him, and that he for some base reason which she could not understand meant to give himself the satisfaction of refusing the fortune which she did promise him.

"Can I not move you?" she reiterated, appealing yet more earnestly, for, womanlike, she could not forget that moment a while ago, when he had knelt instinctively before her, when the irony had gone from his smile, and the laughter in his mocking eyes had yielded to an inward glow.

He shook his head, but remained unmoved.

"I can not tell you, sir," she urged plaintively, "what I would say to the Prince."

"Is it so deadly a secret then?" he asked.

"Call it that, if you will."

"A secret that concerns his life?"

"That I did not say."

"No. It was a guess. A right one, methinks."

"Then if you think so, sir, why not let me go to him?"

"So that you may warn him?"

"You were merely guessing, sir——"

"That you may tell him not to continue his journey," he insisted, speaking less restrainedly now, as he leaned forward closer to her, her brown curls almost brushing against his cheek as they fluttered in the draft.

"I did not say so," she murmured.

"Because there is a trap laid for him—a trap of which you know——"

"No, no!" she cried involuntarily.

"A trap into which he may fall, unknowingly, on his way to the North."

"You say so, sir," she moaned, "not I."

"Assassins are on his track—an attempt will be made against his life. The murderers lie in wait for him, even now; and you, mejuffrouw, who know who those murderers are——"

A cry of anguish rose to her lips.

"No, no, no!" she cried. "It is false! You are only guessing. Remember that I have told you nothing."

But already the tense expression on his

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face had gone. He drew himself up to his full height once more and heaved a deep breath which sounded like a sigh of satisfaction.

"Yet in your candor, mejuffrouw, you have told me much," he said quietly. "You have confirmed much that I only vaguely guessed. The Stadtholder's life is in peril, and you hold in your feeble little hands the threads of the conspiracy which threatens him. Is that not why you are here, mejuffrouw—a prisoner, as you say, at the will of my employer? I am only guessing, remember, but on your face meseems that I can read that I do guess aright."

"Then you will do what I ask?" she exclaimed, with a happy little gasp of renewed hope.

"That, mejuffrouw, is, I fear me, impossible," he said quietly.

"Impossible? But—just now——"

"Just now," he rejoined with affected carelessness, "I said, mejuffrouw, that I would on no account escort you to Delft without knowing what your purpose is with the Prince of Orange. Even now I do not know. I merely guessed."

"But," she entreated, "if I do own that you have guessed aright—partly at any rate—if I do tell you that the Stadtholder's life might be imperiled if I did not give him a timely word of warning, if——"

"Even if you told me all that, mejuffrouw," he broke in lightly, "if you did bring your pride down so far as to trust a miserable knave with a secret which he might sell for money on the morrow—even then, I fear me, I could not do what you ask."

"BUT why not?" she insisted, her voice choking in her throat in the agony of terrible doubt and fear.

"Because the man of whom you spoke just now, the man whom you love, mejuffrouw, has been more farseeing, more prudent, than you or I. He hath put it out of my power to render you this service."

"How?"

"By warning Mynheer Ben Isaje against any attempt at escape on your part, against any attempt at betrayal on mine. Mynheer Ben Isaje is prepared. He hath a guard of ten picked men on the watch, and two more men outside his door. If you tried to leave this house with me without his consent he would prevent you, and I am no match, alas! for twelve men."

"Why should he guard me so?"

"Because he will not be paid if he keep not watch over you."

"But I'll swear to return straightway from Delft. I'll only speak with the Prince and return immediately. . . .

"Money! Always money!" she cried with sudden vehemence. "A great man's life, the honor of a house, the salvation of the land—are these all to be sacrificed because of the greed and cupidity of men?"

"Shall I call Mynheer Ben Isaje?" asked Diogenes placidly. "Mayhap, mejuffrouw, you could persuade him more easily than could I!"

But at this she rose to her feet as suddenly as if she had been stung. The color in her cheeks deepened; the tears were dry in her eyes.

"You!" she exclaimed, and there was a world of bitter contempt in the tone of her voice. "Persuade you who have tricked and fooled me, even while I began to believe in you? You, who for the past half hour have tried to filch a secret from me bit by bit!

"With lying words you led me into telling you even more than I should! And I, poor fool! thought that I had touched your heart, or that at least there was some spark of loyalty in you which mayhap prompted you to guess that the Prince was in danger.

"Fool that I was! Miserable, wretched fool! To think for a moment that you would lend a hand in aught that was noble and chivalrous! I would I had the power to raise the blush of shame in your cheeks, but alas! the shame is only for me, who, trusting in your false promises and your lies, have allowed my tongue to speak words which I would give my life now to unsay—for me who thought that there was in you one feeble spark of pity or of honor!

"Fool! Fool that I was! When I forgot for one brief moment that it was your greed and cupidity that were the props without which this whole edifice of infamy had tottered long ago! Persuade you to do a selfless deed? You, the abductor of women, the paid varlet and mercenary rogue who will thieve and outrage and murder for money!"

She sank back in her chair and, resting her arms upon the table, she buried her face in them, for she had given way at last

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to a passionate fit of weeping. The disappointment was greater than she could bear after the load of sorrow which had been laid on her these past few days.

When she heard through the chatterings of a servant that the Stadtholder was at Delft this very night, the memory of every word which she had heard in the cathedral on New Year's Eve came back to her with renewed vividness. Delft! She remembered that name so well; and Ryswick close by, the only possible way for a northward journey! Then the mill, which Stoutenburg had said was his headquarters; where he had stored arms, ammunition and enough gunpowder to blow up the wooden bridge which spans the Schie and over which the Stadtholder and his bodyguard must pass!

Every word that Stoutenburg and her brother and the others had spoken that night rang now in her ears like a knell:

Delft, Ryswick, the mill, the wooden bridge! Delft, Ryswick, the mill, the wooden bridge! Delft——

Delft was quite near, less than four leagues away. The Stadtholder was there now. He could be warned before it was too late. And she could warn him without compromising her brother and his friends. Then it was that she remembered that in the room below there slept a knave who would do anything for gold.

Thus she had run down to him full of eagerness and full of hope. And now he had refused to help her, and worse still had guessed at a secret which, if he bartered or sold it, meant death to her brother and his friends.

Contempt and hate had broken down her spirit. Smothering both, she was even now ready to fall on her knees, to plead with him, to pray, to implore—if only that could have moved him, if only it meant safety for the Stadtholder, and not merely a useless loss of pride and of dignity.

Anger and misery and utter hopelessness! These were causing her tears. She hated this man who had her in his power and mocked her in her misery; and there was the awful thought that the Stadtholder was so near—less than four leagues away! Why, had she been free she could have run all the way to him. That hideous crime, that appalling tragedy in which her brother would bear a hand, could be averted even now if she were free!

Oh, the misery of it! The awful, wretched helplessness! In a few days—hours mayhap—the Stadtholder would be walking straight into the trap which his murderers had set for him—the broken bridge, the explosion, the assassin Stoutenburg at the carriage door! She saw it all as in a vision of the future, and her brother in the midst of it all, with hands deeply stained in blood.

And she could avert it all—the crime, the sorrow, the awful, hideous shame, if only she were free!

SHE looked up at last, ashamed of her tears, ashamed that a rogue should have seen how keenly she suffered.

She looked up and turned to him once more. The flickering light of the candles fell full upon his splendid figure and upon his face, the color of ashes. There was no trace of his wonted smile around his lips. The eyes, too, looked sunken, and their light was hid beneath the drooping lids. Her shafts, which she had aimed with such deadly precision, had gone home at last. In the bitterness of her heart she apparently had found words which had cut him like a lash.

Satisfied in this at least, she arose to go.

"There is nothing more to say," she said as calmly as she could, trying to still the quivering of her lips. "As you say, Mynheer Ben Isaje has carefully taken the measure of your valor; and it can not come up to that of a dozen picked men, even though life and honor, country and faith might demand at least an effort on their behalf.

"I pray you open the door. I would for mine own sake as well as your own that I had not thought of breaking in on your rest."

Without a word he went to the door and had his hand on the latch ready to obey her, when something in his placid attitude irritated her beyond endurance. Womanlike, she was not yet satisfied. Perhaps a thought of remorse at her cruelty fretted her. Perhaps she pitied him in that he was so base.

Be that as it may, she spoke to him again.

"Have you nothing, then, to say?" she asked.

"What can I say, mejuffrouw?" he queried in reply, as the ghost of his wonted smile crept swiftly back into his pale face.

"Methought no man would care to be

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called a coward by a woman, and remain silent under the taunt."

"You forget, mejuffrouw," he retorted, "that I am so much less than a man—a menial, a rogue, a vagabond; so base that not even the slightest fear of me did creep into your heart. You came to me, here, alone, at dead of night, with an appeal upon your lips, yet you were not afraid. Then you struck me in the face as you would a dog with a whip, and you were no more afraid of me than of the dog whom you had thrashed. So base am I, then, that words of mine are not worthy of your ear.

"Whatever I said, I could not persuade you that for one man to measure his strength against twelve others were not an act of valor but one of senseless foolishness. I might tell you that bravery lies oft in prudence but seldom in foolhardiness, but this I know you are not in a mood now to believe.

"I might even tell you," he continued, with a slight return to his wonted light-hearted carelessness, "I might tell you that certain acts of bravery can not be accomplished without the intervention of protecting saints, and that I have found Saint Bavon an admirable saint to implore in such cases. But this I fear me you are not like to understand.

"So you see, mejuffrouw, that whatever I said I could not prove to you that I am less of a blackguard than I seem."

"You could at least prove it to this extent," she retorted— "by keeping silence over what you may have guessed."

"You mean that I must not sell the secret which you so nearly betrayed. Have no fear, mejuffrouw. My knowledge of it is so scanty that the Stadtholder would not give me five guilders for it."

"Will you swear——"

"Such a miserable cur as I am, mejuffrouw," he said lightly, "is surely an oath breaker as well as a liar and a thief. What were the good of swearing? But I'll swear if you wish," he added gaily.

"Surely you——" she began.

But with a quick gesture he interrupted her.

"*Dondersteen*, mejuffrouw!" he said, more firmly than he had yet spoken before. "If beauty in you is tempered with pity, I entreat you to spare me now. Even knaves, remember, become men sometimes; and my patron Saint Bavon threatens to leave me in the lurch."

He held open the door for her to pass through, and gravely held out one of the pewter candles to her. She could not help but take it, though indeed she felt that the last word between that rogue and herself had not by any means been spoken yet. But she hardly looked at him as she sailed past him out of the room, her heavy skirt trailing behind her with a soft hissing sound.

As soon as she heard the door shut to behind her, she ran up the stairs, back to her own room with all speed, like a frightened hare.

Had she remained in the passage one instant longer she would have heard a sound which would have terrified her. It was the sound of a prolonged and ringing laugh which roused the echoes of this sleeping house, but which had neither mirth nor joy in its tone.

And had she then peeped through a keyhole she would have seen a strange sight. A man who, in the flickering candlelight, looked tall and massive as a giant, took up one of the wooden chairs in the room, and after holding it out at arm's length for a few seconds, he proceeded to smash it viciously bit by bit until it lay, a mass of broken *débris*, at his feet.

CHAPTER XXX

THE MILL

LESS than half a league to the south-east of Ryswick — where the Schie makes a sharp curve up toward the north —there is a solitary windmill; strange in this, that it has no companions near it, but stands quite alone, with its adjoining miller's hut nestling close up against it like a tiny chick beside the mother hen. It dominates the mud flats and lean field which lie for many leagues around.

On this day, which was the fourth of the New Year, these mud flats and the pasture land lay under a carpet of half-melted snow and ice which seemed to render the landscape more weird and desolate, and the mill itself more deserted and solitary.

Yet less than half a league away the pointed gables and wooden spires of Ryswick break the monotony of the horizon line and suggest the life and movement pertaining to a city, however small. But life and movement seem never to penetrate as far as this mill. They spread their

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way out toward 'S Gravenhage and the sea.

Nature herself hath decreed that the mill shall remain solitary and cut off from the busy world, for day after day and night after night throughout the year a mist rises from the mud flats around and envelops the mill as in a shroud. In Winter the mist is frosty. In Summer at times it is faintly tinged with gold. But it is always there and through it the rest of the living world—Ryswick and 'S Gravenhage and Delft farther away—appear only as visions on the other side of a veil.

Just opposite the mill, some two hundred paces away to the east, the waters of the Schie rush with unwonted swiftness around the curve; so swiftly in fact that the ice hardly ever forms a thick crust over them, with the result that this portion of an otherwise excellent waterway is, in the Winter, impracticable for sleighs.

Beyond this bend in the river, however, less than half a league away, there is a wooden bridge, wide and strongly built, across which it is quite easy for men and beasts to pass who have come from the south and desire to rejoin the great highway which leads from Delft to Leyden.

In the morning of that same fourth day in the New Year, two men sat together in what was once the weighing-room of the mill. Their fur coats were wrapped closely around their shoulders, for a keen northwesterly wind had found its way through the chinks and cracks of tumble-down doors and ill fitting window frames.

Though a soft, powdery veil, smooth as velvet to the touch and made up of flour and fine dust, lay over everything, and the dry, sweet smell of corn still hung in the close atmosphere, there was little else in this room now that suggested the peaceful purpose for which it had been originally intended.

The big weighing-machines had been pushed into corners, and all around the sloping walls swords, pistols and muskets were piled in orderly array. There was also a row of iron boxes standing a foot or so apart from one another and away from any other objects in the room.

The silence which reigned over the surrounding landscape did not find its kingdom inside this building, for a perpetual hum, a persistent buzzing noise as of bees in their hives, filtered through the floor and the low ceiling of this room. Men moved and talked and laughed inside the mill, but the movement and the laughter were subdued, as if muffled in that same mantle of mist which covered the outside world.

The two men in the weighing-room were sitting at a table on which were scattered papers, inkhorn and pens, a sword, a couple of pistols and two or three pairs of skates. One of them was leaning forward and talking eagerly.

"I think you can rest satisfied, my good Stoutenburg," he said. "Our preparations leave nothing to be desired. I have just seen Jan, and together we have despatched the man Lucas van Sparendam to Delft. He is the finest spy in the country, and can ferret out a plan or sift a rumor quicker than any man I know.

"He will remain at Delft and keep the Prinzenhof under observation, and will leave the city only if anything untoward should happen, and then he will come straight here and report to us. He is a splendid runner, and can easily cover the distance between Delft and this mill in an hour. That is satisfactory, is it not?"

"Quite," replied Stoutenburg curtly.

"Our arrangements here, on the other hand, are equally perfect," resumed Beresteyn eagerly. "We have kept the whole thing in our own hands. Heemskerk and I will be at our posts ready to fire the gunpowder at the exact moment when the advance guard of the Prince's escort will have gone over the bridge. You, dagger in hand, will be prepared to make a dash for the carriage itself. Our men will attack the scattered and confused guard at a word from van Does.

"What could be more simple, more perfect than that? Yourself, Heemskerk, van Does and I—all of one mind, all equally true, silent and determined. You seem so restless and anxious. . . . Frankly, I do not understand you."

"IT IS not of our preparations or of our arrangements that I am thinking, Nicolaes," said Stoutenburg somberly; "these have been thought out well enough. Nothing but superhuman intervention or treachery can save the Stadtholder; of that am I convinced. Neither God nor the devil cares to interfere in men's affairs; we need not, therefore, fear superhuman intervention. But 'tis the thought of treachery that haunts me."

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"Bah!" quoth Beresteyn with a shrug of the shoulders. "You have made a nightmare of that thought. Treachery? There is no fear of treachery. Yourself, van Does, Heemskerk and I are the only ones who know anything at this moment of our plans for tomorrow. Do you suspect van Does of treachery, or Heemskerk or me?"

"I was not thinking of Heemskerk or of van Does," rejoined Stoutenburg, "and even our men will know nothing of the attack until the last moment. Danger, friend, doth not lie in or around the mill. It lurks at Rotterdam, and hath name Gilda."

"Gilda! What can you fear from Gilda now?"

"Everything. Have you never thought on it, friend? Jan, remember, lost track of that knave soon after he left Haarlem. At first he struck across the waterways in a southerly direction, and for a while Jan and the others were able to keep him in sight. But soon darkness settled in, and along many intricate backwaters our rogue was able to give them the slip."

"I know that," rejoined Beresteyn somewhat impatiently. "I was here in the early morning when Jan reported to you. He also told you that he and his men pushed on as far as Leyden that night and regained the road to Rotterdam the following day.

"At Zegwaard and again at Zevenhuizen they ascertained that a party consisting of two women in a sledge and an escort of three cavaliers had halted for refreshments at those places and then continued their journey southward. Since then Jan has found out definitely that Gilda and her escort arrived early last night at the house of Ben Isaje at Rotterdam, and he came straight on here to report to you. Frankly, I see nothing in all this to cause you so much anxiety."

"You think then that everything is for the best?" asked Stoutenburg grimly. "You did not begin to wonder how it was that, as Jan ascertained at Zegwaard and at Zevenhuizen, Gilda continued her journey without any protest? According to the people whom Jan questioned she looked sad certainly, but she was always willing to start again on her way. What do you make of that, my friend?"

Once more Beresteyn shrugged his shoulders.

"Gilda is proud," he said. "She hath resigned herself to her fate."

The Lord of Stoutenburg laughed aloud.

"How little you, her own brother, know her!" he retorted. "Gilda resigned? Gilda content to let events shape themselves—such events as those which she heard us planning in the Groote Kerk on New Year's Eve?

"Why, my friend, Gilda will never be resigned. She will never be content until she hath moved earth and heaven to save the Stadtholder from my avenging hand!"

"But what can she do now? Ben Isaje is honest in business matters. It would not pay him to play his customers false. And I have promised him two thousand guilders if he keeps her safely as a prisoner of war, not to be let out even on parole. Ben Isaje would not betray me. He is too shrewd for that."

"That may be true of Ben Isaje himself; but what of his wife? His sons or daughters, if he have any? His serving-wenches, his apprentices and his men? How do you know that they are not amenable to promises of heavy bribes?"

"But even then——"

"Do you not think that at Rotterdam every one by now knows the Prince's movements? He passed within half a league of the town yesterday. There is not a serving-wench in that city at this moment who does not know that Maurice of Nassau slept at Delft last night and will start northward tomorrow."

"And what of that?" queried Beresteyn, trying to keep up a semblance of that carelessness which he was far from feeling now.

"Do you believe, then, that Gilda will stay quietly in the house of Ben Isaje, knowing that the Prince is within four leagues of her door? Knowing that he will start northward tomorrow? Knowing that my headquarters are here, close to Ryswick? Knowing, in fact, all that she knows?"

"I had not thought on all that," murmured Beresteyn under his breath.

"And there is another danger too, friend, greater perhaps than any other," continued Stoutenburg vehemently.

"Good Heaven, Stoutenburg, what do you mean?"

"That cursed foreign adventurer——"

"What about him?"

"Have you, then, never thought of him as being amenable to a bribe from Gilda?"

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"In Heaven's name, man, do not think of such awful eventualities!"

"But we must think of them, my good Beresteyn. Events are shaping themselves differently from what we expected. We must make preparations for our safety accordingly, and above all realize the fact that Gilda will move heaven and earth to thwart us in our plans."

"But she can do nothing," persisted Beresteyn sullenly, "without betraying me. In Haarlem it was different. She might have spoken to my father of what she knew, but she would not do so to a stranger, knowing that with one word she can send me first and all of you afterward to the scaffold."

Stoutenburg, with an exclamation of angry impatience, brought his clenched fist crashing down upon the table.

"ARE you a child, Beresteyn," he cried hotly, "or are you wilfully blind to your danger and to mine? I tell you that Gilda will never allow me to kill the Prince of Orange without raising a finger to save him."

"But what can I do?"

"Send for Gilda at once, tonight," urged Stoutenburg. "Convey her under escort hither, in all deference, in all honor; she would be here under her brother's care."

"A woman in this place at such a moment!" cried Beresteyn. "You are mad, Stoutenburg."

"I shall go mad if she is not here," rejoined the other more calmly. "The fear has entered into my soul, Nicolaes, that Gilda will yet betray us at the eleventh hour. That fear is a premonition. Call it obsession if you will, but it unmans me, friend."

Beresteyn was silent now. He drew his cloak closer around his shoulders, for suddenly he felt a chill which seemed to have crept down to his bones.

"But it is unpractical, man," he persisted with a kind of sullen despair. "Gilda and another woman here tomorrow, when not half a league away——"

"Justice will be meted out to a tyrant and an assassin," broke in Stoutenburg quietly. "Gilda is not a woman as other women are. Though in her soul now she may be shrinking at the thought of this summary justice, she will be strong and brave when the hour comes.

"In any case," he added more roughly, "we can keep her closely guarded; and in the miller's hut, with the miller and his wife to look after her, she will be as safe and as comfortable as circumstances will allow. We should have her then under our own eyes and know that she can not betray us."

As usual, Beresteyn was already yielding to the stronger will, the more powerful personality of his friend. His association with Stoutenburg had gradually blunted his finer feelings. Like a fly that is entangled in the web of a spider, he tried to fight against the network of intrigue and of cowardice which hemmed him in more and more closely with every step that he took along the path of crime.

He was filled with remorse at thought of the wrong which he had done to Gilda, but he was no longer his own master; the tide of intrigue and the fear of discovery were carrying him away from his better self.

"You should have thought on all that sooner, Stoutenburg," he said in final, feeble protest. "We need never have sent Gilda to Rotterdam in the company of a foreign adventurer of whom we knew nothing."

"At the time it seemed simple enough," quoth Stoutenburg impatiently. "You suggested the house of Ben Isaje the banker and it seemed an excellent plan. I did not think of distance then, and it is only since we arrived at Ryswick that I realized how near all these places are to one another, and how easy it would be for Gilda to betray us even now."

Beresteyn was silent after that. It was easy to see that his friend's restless anxiety was eating into his own soul. Stoutenburg watched him with those hollow, glowing eyes of his that seemed to send a magnetic current of strong will power into the weaker vessel.

"Well, perhaps you are right," said Beresteyn at last. "Perhaps you are right.

"After all," he added, half to himself, "perhaps I shall feel easier in my conscience when I have Gilda near me and feel that I can at least watch over her."

Stoutenburg, having gained his point, jumped to his feet and drew a deep breath of satisfaction.

"That's bravely said!" he exclaimed. "Will you go yourself at once to Rotterdam? With two or three of our most trusted men you could bring Gilda here with absolute safety. You need only to

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make a slight detour when you near Delft so as to avoid the city. You could be here by six o'clock this evening at the latest, and Jan in the meanwhile with a contingent of our stalwarts shall try and find that abominable *plepshurk* again and bring him here, too, without delay."

"No, no," said Beresteyn quickly. "I'll not go myself. I could not bear to meet Gilda just yet. I will not have her think that I had a hand in her abduction, and my presence might arouse her suspicions."

Stoutenburg laughed unconcernedly.

"You would rather that she thought I had instigated the deed.

"Well!" he added with a careless shrug, "my shoulders are broad enough to bear the brunt of her wrath if she does. If you will not go yourself, we will give full instructions to Jan. He shall bring Gilda and her woman hither with due respect and despatch, and lay the knave by the heels at the same time.

"Ten or a dozen of our men or even more can easily be spared today: there is really nothing for them to do, and they are best out of mischief by being kept busy. Now while I go to give Jan his instructions do you write a letter to Ben Isaje, telling him that it is your wish that Gilda should accompany the bearer of your sign manual."

"But——"

"Tush, man!" exclaimed Stoutenburg impatiently, while a tone of contempt rang through his harsh voice. "You can so word the letter that even if it were found it need not compromise you in any way. You might just have discovered that your sister was in the hands of brigands, and be sending an escort to rescue her. Gilda will be grateful to you then and ready to believe in you. Write what you like, but for Heaven's sake write quickly. Every moment's delay drives me well nigh distraught."

WITH jerky, feverish movements he pushed paper and inkhorn nearer to Beresteyn, who hesitated no longer but at once began to write. Stoutenburg went to the door and loudly called for Jan.

Ten minutes later the letter was written, folded and delivered into the keeping of Jan, who was standing at attention and recapitulating the orders which had been given him.

"I take a dozen men with me," he said slowly, "and we follow the course of the Schie as far as Rotterdam. Fortunately it is passable practically the whole of the way."

Stoutenburg nodded in approval.

"I present this letter to Mynheer Ben Isaje, the banker," continued Jan, "and ask him at once to request the jongejuffrouw that she deign to accompany us."

"Yes. That is right," quoth Stoutenburg. "But remember that I want you above all things to find that foreigner again. You said that he was sleeping last night in Mynheer Ben Isaje's house."

"So I understood, my lord."

"Well, you must move heaven and earth to find him, Jan. I want him here—a prisoner. Remember! Do not let him slip through your fingers this time. It might mean life or death to us all. By fair means or foul you must lay him by the heels."

"It should not be difficult, my lord," assented Jan quietly. "I will pick my men, and I have no doubt that we shall come across the foreigner somewhere in the neighborhood. He can not have gone far, and even if he left the city we will easily come on his track."

"That's brave, Jan. Then come straight back here. Two or three of your men can in the meanwhile escort the jongejuffrouw, who will travel by sledge. You must avoid Delft of course, and make a detour there."

"I had best get horses at Rotterdam, my lord. The sledge can follow the left bank of the Schie all the way, which will be the best means of avoiding Delft."

"And remember," concluded Stoutenburg in his most peremptory manner, "that you must all be back here before ten o'clock tonight—the jongejuffrouw first and you with the foreigner later. It is not much more than eight o'clock now; you have the whole day before you. Let the sledge pull up outside the miller's hut. Everything will be ready there by then for the jongejuffrouw's reception; and let your watchwords be 'Silence, discretion, speed!' You understand?"

"I understand, my lord," replied Jan simply, as he gave a military salute. Then he quietly turned on his heel and went out of the room.

The two friends were once more alone, straining their ears to catch every sound which came to them now from below.

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Muffled and enveloped in the mist, the voice of Jan uttering brief words of command could be distinctly heard, as well as the metallic click of skates and the tramping of heavily booted feet upon the ground.

But ten minutes later all these sounds had died away. Jan and his men had gone to fetch Gilda—the poor little pawn moved hither and thither by the ruthless and ambitious hands of men.

Beresteyn had buried his head in his hands, in a sudden fit of overpowering remorse. Stoutenburg looked on him silently for a while. His haggard face appeared drawn and sunken in the pale gray light which found its way through the tiny window up above. Passion greater than that which broke down the spirit of his friend was tearing at his heart-strings. Ambition fought with love, and remorse with determination.

But through it all the image of Gilda flitted before his burning eyes across this dimly lighted room, reproachful and sweet and tantalizingly beautiful. The desire to have her near him in the greatest hour of his life on the morrow had been the true mainspring which had prompted him to urge Beresteyn to send for her.

It seemed to him that Gilda's presence would bring him luck in his dark undertaking, so heavily fraught with crime. With a careless shrug of the shoulders he was ready to dismiss all thoughts of the wrong which he had done her, in favor of his hopes, his desire, his certainty that a glorious future in his arms would compensate her for all that he had caused her to endure.

CHAPTER XXXI

A RUN THROUGH THE NIGHT

THAT same morning of this fourth day of the New Year found Gilda Beresteyn sitting silent and thoughtful in the tiny room which had been placed at her disposal in the house of Mynheer Ben Isaje, the banker.

A few hours ago she had come back to it, running like some frightened animal that has just escaped an awful but unknown danger, and had thrown herself down on the narrow bed in the alcove in an agony of soul far more difficult to bear than any sorrow which had assailed her during the last few days.

A great, a vivid ray of hope had pierced the darkness of her misery. It had flickered low at first, then had glowed with wonderful intensity, flickered again, and finally died down as hope itself fell dying once more in the arms of despair.

The disappointment which she had endured then amounted almost to physical pain; her heart ached and beat intolerably. And with that disappointment was coupled a sense of hatred and of humiliation, different from any suffering she had ever had to bear before.

A man could have helped her and had refused. He could have helped her to avert a crime more hideous than any that had ever blackened the pages of the country's history. With that one man's help she could have stopped that crime from being committed and he had refused. Nay, more! He had first dragged her secret from her, word by word, luring her into thoughts of security with the hope which he dangled before her.

He knew everything now. She had practically admitted everything, save the identity of those whose crime she wished to avert. But even that identity would be easy for the man to guess. Stoutenburg, of course, had paid him to lay hands on her; but her brother Nicolaes was Stoutenburg's friend and ally, and his life and that of his friends were now in the hands of that rogue, who might betray them with the knowledge which he had filched from her.

No wonder that hour after hour she lay prostrate on the bed, while these dark thoughts hammered away in her brain. The Prince of Orange walking unknowingly straight to his death, or Nicolaes—her brother!—and his friends betrayed to the vengeance of that Prince. Ghosts of those who had already died, victims to that same merciless vengeance flitted in the darkness before her feverish fancy—John of Barneveld, the Lord of Groeneveld, the sorrowing widows and fatherless children, and in their trail the ghost of the great Stadtholder, William the Silent, murdered as his son would be—at Delft, close to Ryswick and the mill, where even now Nicolaes her brother was learning the final lesson of infamy.

When, in the late morning, Maria came into the room to bring her mistress some warm milk and bread, and to minister to her comforts, she found her dearly loved jongejuffrouw wide-eyed and feverish.

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But not a word could she get out of Gilda, while she dressed her hair, except an assurance that their troubles—as far as Maria could gage them—would soon be over now, and that in twenty-four hours mayhap they would be escorted back to Haarlem.

"When I trust that I shall have the joy of seeing three impudent knaves swing on gibbets in the market place," quoth Maria decisively. "And one of them—the most impudent of the lot—drawn and quartered, or burned at the stake!" she added with savage insistence.

When Gilda was dressed, she asked for leave to speak with Mynheer Ben Isaje. The money lender, obsequious, affable, received her with the utmost deference and in a few words put the situation before her. Mevrouw Isaje, he said, was from home; he had not been apprised of the jongejuffrouw's coming, or his wife would have been ready to receive her at his private house, which was situate but half a league out of Rotterdam.

But in the course of the afternoon Mevrouw Isaje would return from the visit which she had been paying to her father; until that hour Mynheer Ben Isaje begged that the jongejuffrouw would look upon this miserable hovel as her property and would give what orders she desired for the furtherance of her comfort.

In the afternoon, he concluded, an escort would once more be ready to convey the jongejuffrouw to that same private house of his, where there was a nice garden and a fine view over the Schie instead of the confined outlook on squalid houses opposite, which was quite unworthy of the jongejuffrouw's glance.

Gilda did not attempt to stay the flow of Ben Isaje's eloquence She thanked him graciously for everything that he had already done for her comfort.

Maria, more loquacious and bubbling over with indignation, asked him when this outrageous confinement of her person and that of her exalted mistress at the hands of brigands would cease, and if Mynheer Ben Isaje was aware that such confinement against the jongejuffrouw's will would inevitably entail the punishment of hanging.

But thereupon Mynheer Ben Isaje merely rubbed his thin hands together and became first as evasive and then as mute as only those of his race can contrive to be.

Then Gilda, making an effort to speak unconcernedly, asked him what had become of the men who had brought her hither from Haarlem.

"They spent half the night eating and drinking at the tavern, mejuffrouw," said Ben Isaje blandly.

"Ah!" rejoined Gilda quietly. "Methought one of them had found hospitality under your roof."

"So he had, mejuffrouw. But this morning when I called him—for I had some business to transact with him—I found his room already empty. No doubt he had gone to join his companions at the tavern.

"But the rascal's movements need not disturb the jongejuffrouw for one moment. After today she need never set eyes on him again.

"Save when he is hanging on a gibbet in the Groote Markt," broke in Maria viciously. "I for one never go to see such sights, but when that rascal hangs it shall be a holiday for me to go and get a last look at him."

LATER on in the day Ben Isaje, more affable and obsequious than he had ever been, came to announce to the jongejuffrouw that her sledge was awaiting her at the top of the street.

Silently and resignedly, as had been her wont these past two days, Gilda Beresteyn, wrapping her cloak and hood closely around her, followed Mynheer Ben Isaje out of the house. Maria walked immediately behind her, muttering imprecations against brigands, and threatening dire punishments against Ben Isaje.

Though it was only three o'clock in the afternoon, it was already quite dark in this narrow street, where tall gables almost touched one another at the top. Only from the tiny latticed windows feeble patches of yellow light glimmered weirdly through the fog.

The sledge was waiting at the top of the street, as Mynheer Ben Isaje had said. Gilda shuddered as soon as she caught sight of it again; it represented so much that was vivid and tangible of her present anxiety and sorrow. It stood upon an open market place, with the driver sitting up at his post and three horses harnessed thereto.

The small tavern was at the corner on the left, and as Gilda walked rapidly to the sledge she saw two of the men who had

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been escorting her hitherto—the thin man with the abnormally long legs, and the fat one with the red nose and round eyes. But of the third man's tall, splendid figure she did not catch one glimpse.

The two men nudged each another as she passed and whispered excitedly to each other, but she could not hear what they said. The next moment she found herself being handed into the vehicle by Ben Isaje, who thereupon took humble leave of her.

"You are not coming with us, mynheer?" she asked in astonishment.

"Not—not just yet, mejuffrouw," murmured Ben Isaje somewhat incoherently. "It is too early yet in the afternoon—er—for me to—to leave my business. I have the honor to bid the jongejuffrouw God-speed."

"But," said Gilda, who suddenly misliked Ben Isaje's manner, yet could not have told why, "the mevrouw—your wife—she is ready to receive me?"

"Of a truth—certainly," replied the man.

Gilda would have given much to question him further. She was quite sure that there was something strange in his manner, something that she mistrusted; but just as she was about to speak again, there was a sudden command of "Forward!" The driver cracked his whip, the harness jingled, the sledge gave a big lurch forward; and the next moment Gilda found herself once more being rushed at great speed through the cold air.

She could not see much around her, for the fog out in the open seemed even more dense than it was inside the city, and the darkness of the night crept swiftly through the fog. All that she knew for certain was that the city was very soon left behind, that the driver was urging his horses on to unusual speed, and that she must be traveling along a river bank, because when the harness rattled and jingled less loudly than usual she could hear distinctly the clink of metal skates upon the ice, as wayfarers no doubt were passing to and fro.

Solitary as she was—for Maria and her eternal grumblings were but poor company—she fell to thinking again over the future, as she had done not only last night but through the past few interminable days. It seemed almost as if she had never, never thought of anything else, as if those same few days stretched out far away behind her into dim and nebulous infinity.

During those days she had alternately hoped and feared and been disappointed, only to hope again; but the disappointment of last night was undoubtedly the most bitter that she had yet experienced. So bitter had it been that for a time, after its intense poignancy had gone, her faculties and power of thinking had become numbed, and now—very gradually, unknown at first even to herself—hope shook itself free from the grip of disappointment and peeped up at her out of the abyss of her despair.

Did that unscrupulous knave really have the last word in the matter? Had his caprice the power to order the destiny of this land and the welfare of its faith?

Bah! The very thought was monstrous and impossible. Was the life of the Prince of Orange to be sacrificed because a rascal would not help her to give him that word of warning which might save him even now at the eleventh hour?

No! Gilda Beresteyn refused to believe that God, who had helped the armies of the Netherlands throughout their struggle against the might of Spain, would allow a rogu to have so much power.

After all, she was not going to be shut up in prison! She was going to the house of ordinary, respectable burghers. True, they were of alien faith, but they were well to do, had a family, serving-women and men.

Surely among these there would be one who, amenable to cajoleries or to promises, would prove to be the instrument sent by God to save the Stadtholder from an assassin's dagger!

Gilda Berestyn, wrapped in this new train of thought, lost count of time, of distance and of cold. She lived during one whole hour in the happiness of this newly risen hope, making plans, conjecturing, rehearsing over in her mind what she would say, how she would probe the loyalty, the kindness of those who would be around her tonight.

Delft was so near! And after all, even Maria might be bribed to forget her fears and her grievances and to become that priceless instrument of salvation, of which Gilda dreamed as the sledge flew swiftly along through the night.

IT was Maria who roused her suddenly out of these happy fancies; Maria who said plaintively:

"Shall we never get to that *verdommte* house? Ben Isaje said that it was

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situate only half a league from Rotterdam."

"We must be close to it," murmured Gilda.

"Close to it!" retorted Maria. "We seem to be burning the ground under the horses' hoofs. We have left Rotterdam behind us this hour past. It is the longest half league that I have ever known."

"Peep out under the hood, Maria. Can not you see where we are?"

Maria peeped out as she was bid.

"I can see the lights of a city far away on our right," she said. "From the direction in which we have been going and the ground which we have covered I should guess that city to be Delft."

"Delft!" exclaimed Gilda, smothering a scream.

The driver had just pulled up his horses, allowing them to go at a walk so as to restore their wind and ease them for a while. Gilda tried her best to peer through the darkness. All that she could see were those lights, far away on the right, that proclaimed the distant city.

A chill struck suddenly to her heart. Ben Isaje had lied! Why? She was not being taken to his house, which was situate half a league outside Rotterdam. Then whither was she being taken? What new misery, what new outrage awaited her now?

The lights of the distant city receded farther and farther away from her view. The driver once more put his horses at a trot. The sledge moved along more smoothly now; it seemed as if it were going over the surface of the river. Delft was being left behind, and the sledge was following the Schie, on toward Ryswick. . . .

The minutes sped on; another quarter of an hour, another half hour, another hour in this dread suspense. The driver was urging his horses unmercifully. It was only when for a few brief moments he put them at a walking pace that Gilda heard, all around her as it seemed, that metallic click of skates which told her that the sledge was surrounded by men who were there to watch over her and see that she did not escape.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE CAPTIVE LION

BERESTEYN was sitting at the table in the weighing-room of the mill; his elbows rested on the table, and his right hand supported his head. In the feeble light of the lanthorn placed quite close to him, his face looked sullen and dark, and his eyes, overshadowed by his frowning brows, were fixed with restless eagerness upon the narrow door.

Stoutenburg, with hands crossed over his chest, with head bare and collar impatiently torn away from around his neck, was pacing up and down the long, low room like a caged beast of prey.

"Enter!" he shouted impatiently in response to a loud knock on the door.

Then, as Jan entered, and, having saluted, remained standing by the door, he paused in his feverish walk and asked in a curiously hoarse voice, choked with anxiety—

"Is everything all right, Jan?"

"Everything, my lord."

"The jongejuffrouw——"

"In the hut, my lord. There is a good fire there and the woman is preparing some hot supper for the lady."

"How does she seem?"

"She stepped very quietly out of the sledge, my lord, the moment I told her that we had arrived. She asked no questions, and walked straight into the hut. Meseemed that the jongejuffrouw knew exactly where she was."

"The woman will look after her comforts well?"

"Oh yes, my lord; though she is only a rough peasant she will try to do her best, and the jongejuffrouw has her own waiting-woman with her as well."

"And the horses?"

"In the shed behind the hut."

"Look after them well, Jan; we may want to use them again tomorrow."

"They shall be well looked after, my lord."

"And you have placed the sentry outside the hut?"

"Two men in the front and two in the rear, as you have commanded, my lord."

Stoutenburg drew a deep breath of satisfaction; but anxiety seemed to have exhausted him, for now that his questions had been clearly answered, he sank into a chair.

"All well, Nicolaes," he said more calmly as he placed a reassuring hand upon his friend's shoulder.

But Nicolaes groaned aloud.

"Would to God," he said, "that all were well!"

Smothering an impatient retort, Stoutenburg once more turned to Jan.

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"And what news of the foreigner?" he queried eagerly.

"We have got him, my lord," replied Jan.

"By ——!" exclaimed Stoutenburg. "How did you do it?"

His excitement was at fever pitch now. He was leaning forward and his attitude was one of burning expectancy. His hollow eyes were fixed upon Jan's lips as if they would extract from them the glad news which they held. Whatever weakness there was in Stoutenburg's nature, one thing in him was strong—and that was hatred. He could hate with an intensity of passion worthy of a fine cause.

He hated the Stadtholder first, and secondly the nameless adventurer who had humiliated him and forced him to lick the dust; wounded in his vanity and in his arrogance, he was consumed with an inordinate desire for revenge. The hope that this revenge was now at last in sight, that the man whom he hated so desperately was now in his power, almost caused the light of mania to dance in his glowing eyes.

"How did you do it, Jan?" he reiterated hoarsely.

"It was not far from the mill," said Jan simply. "Until then he gave us the slip, though we spied him just outside Delft on our way to Rotterdam this morning. My impression is that he went back to Rotterdam then, and that he followed the jongejuffrouw's sledge practically all the way. Close to the mill he was forced to draw a little nearer, as it was getting very dark and probably he did not know his way about. I am convinced that he wished to ascertain exactly whither we were taking the jongejuffrouw. At any rate I and some of our fellows who had lagged in the rear caught sight of him then——"

"And you seized him?" cried Stoutenburg with exultant joy.

"He was alone, my lord," replied Jan with a placid smile, "and there were seven of us at the time. Two or three of the men, though, are even now nursing unpleasant wounds. I myself fared rather badly, with a bruised head and half-broken collar bone. The man is a demon for fighting, but there were seven of us."

"Well done, Jan!" cried Beresteyn now, for Stoutenburg had become speechless with the delight of this glorious news. "And what did you do with the rogue?"

"We tied him securely with ropes and dragged him along with us. Oh, we made certain of him, my lord—you may be sure of that. And now I and another man have taken him down into the basement below and we have fastened him to one of the beams, where I imagine the northwest wind will soon cool his temper."

"Aye, that it will!" quoth Stoutenburg lustily. "Take the lanthorn, Jan, and let us to him at once. Beresteyn, friend, will you come too? Your hand, like your mind, must be itching to get at the villain's face."

THE two men took good care to wrap their cloaks well around their shoulders and to pull their fur caps closely around their ears. Thus muffled up against the bitterness of the night, they went out of the mill, followed by Jan, who carried the lanthorn.

Outside the door steep, ladder-like steps led to the ground. The place referred to by Jan as "the basement" was in reality the skeleton foundations on which the mill rested. These were made up of huge beams, green and slimy with age and driven deep down into the muddy flat below. Ten feet above towered the floor of the mill.

Darkness like pitch reigned on this spot, but as Jan swung his lanthorn along, the solid beams detached themselves one by one out of the gloom; their ice-covered surface reflected the yellow, artificial light, and huge icicles of weird and fantastic shapes like outstretched, giant arms and fingers hung down from the transverse bars and from the wooden framework of the mill above.

To one of the upright beams a man was securely fastened with ropes wound around about his body. His powerful muscles were straining against the cords which tied his arms behind his back. A compassionate hand had put his broad-brimmed hat upon his head to protect his ears and nose against the frost, but his mighty chest was bare, for doublet and shirt had been torn in the reckless fight which preceded final capture.

Jan held up the lanthorn and pointed out to my lord the prisoner whom he was so proud to have captured. The light fell full upon the pinioned figure, splendid in its air of rebellious helplessness. Here was a man, momentarily conquered it is true, but obviously not vanquished; and though the ropes now cut into his body, though the biting wind lashed his bare chest, and dark stains showed upon his shirt, the spirit

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within was as free and untrammeled as ever —the spirit of independence and of adventure which is willing to accept the knock-down blows of Fate as readily and cheerfully as her favors.

Despite the torn shirt and the ragged doublet there was yet an air of swagger about the whole person of the man—swagger that became almost insolent as the Lord of Stoutenburg approached. He threw back his head and looked his sworn enemy straight in the face; his eyes were laughing still, and a smile of cool irony played around his lips.

"Well done, Jan!" quoth Stoutenburg with a deep sigh of satisfaction.

He was standing with arms akimbo and legs wide apart, enjoying to the full the intense delight of gazing for a while in silence on his discomfited enemy.

"Ah! but it is good," he said at last, "to look upon a helpless rogue."

"'Tis a sight then," retorted the prisoner lightly, "which your Magnificence hath often provided for your friends and your adherents."

"Bah!" rejoined Stoutenburg, who was determined to curb his temper if he could. "Your insolence now, my man, hath not the power to anger me. It strikes me as ludicrous, even pathetic, in its senselessness. If I were in your unpleasant position, I would try by submission to earn a slight measure of leniency from my betters."

"No doubt you would, my lord," quoth Diogenes dryly, "but you see I have up to now not yet come across my betters. When I do I may take your advice."

"*Verdommte Keerl!* What say you, Beresteyn?" added Stoutenburg, turning to his friend. "Shall we leave him here tonight to cool his impudence? We can always hang him tomorrow." Beresteyn made no immediate reply. His face was pale and haggard, and his glance, shifty and furtive, seemed to avoid that of the prisoner.

"You must see that the fellow is well guarded, Jan," resumed Stoutenburg curtly. "Give him some food, but on no account allow him the slightest freedom."

"My letters to Ben Isaje," murmured Beresteyn as Stoutenburg already turned to go. "Hath he perchance got them by him still?"

"The letters! Yes! I had forgotten!" said the other. "Search him, Jan!" he commanded.

JAN put down the lanthorn and then proceeded to lay rough hands upon the captive philosopher; he had a heavy score to pay off—an aching collar bone and a bruised head, and the weight of a powerful fist to avenge. He was not like to be gentle in his task. He tore at the prisoner's doublet, and in his search for a hidden pocket he disclosed an ugly wound which had lacerated the shoulder.

"Some of us took off our skates," he remarked casually "and brought him down with them. The blades were full sharp, and we swung them by their straps; they made excellent weapons thus. The fellow should have more than one wound about him."

"Three, my good Jan, to be quite accurate," said Diogenes calmly, "but all endurable. I had ten about me outside Prague once, but the fellows there were fighting better than you and in a worthier cause."

Jan's rough hands continued their exhaustive search; a quickly smothered groan from the prisoner caused Stoutenburg to laugh.

"That sound," he said, "was music to mine ear."

Jan now drew a small leather wallet and a parchment roll, both from the wide flap of one of the prisoner's boots. Stoutenburg pounced upon the wallet; and Beresteyn, with eager anxiety, tore the parchment out of Jan's hand.

"It is the formal order to Ben Isaje," he said, "to pay over the money to this knave. Is there anything else, Jan?" he continued excitedly. "A thinner paper—shaped like a letter?"

"Nothing else, mynheer," replied Jan.

"Did you, then, deliver my letter to Ben Isaje, fellow?" queried Beresteyn of the prisoner.

"My friend Jan should be able to tell you that," he replied. "Hath he not been searching the very folds of my skin?"

In the meanwhile Stoutenburg had been examining the contents of the wallet.

"Jewelry belonging to the jongejuffrouw," he said dryly, "which this rogue hath stolen from her. Will you take charge of them, Nicolaes?

"And here," he added, counting out a few pieces of gold and silver, "is some of your own money."

He made as if he would return this to Beresteyn; then a new idea seemed to strike him, for he put all the money back

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into the wallet and said to Jan: "Put this wallet back where you found it, Jan. And, Nicolaes," he added, turning back to young Beresteyn, "will you allow me to look at that bond?"

While Jan replaced the wallet in the flap of the prisoner's boot, Beresteyn handed the parchment to Stoutenburg. The latter then ordered Jan to hold up the lanthorn so that by its light he might read the writing.

This he did, twice over, with utmost attention; after which he tore off very carefully a narrow strip from the top of the document.

"Now," he said quietly, "this paper wherever found can not compromise you in any way, Nicolaes. The name of Ben Isaje, who alone could trace the cipher signature back to you, we will scatter to the winds."

And he tore the narrow strip which he had severed from the document into infinitesimal fragments, which he then allowed the wind to snatch out of his hand and to whirl about and away into space. But the document itself he folded up with ostentatious care and slipped it into the pocket of his doublet.

"What do you want with that?" asked Beresteyn anxiously.

"I don't know yet, but it might be very useful," replied the other. "So many things may occur within the next few days that such an ambiguously worded document might prove of the utmost value."

"But the signature——" urged Beresteyn. "My father——"

"The signature, you told me, friend, is one that you use in the ordinary way of business, whilst the wording of the document in itself can not compromise you in any way; it is merely a promise to pay for service rendered. Leave this document in my keeping. Believe me, it is quite safe with me and might yet be of incalculable value to us. One never knows."

"No, one never does know," broke in the prisoner airily, "for a truth when there's murder to be done, pillage or outrage, the Lord of Stoutenburg never knows what other infamy may come to his hand."

"Insolent knave!" exclaimed Stoutenburg hoarsely, as with a cry of unbridled fury he suddenly raised his arm and with the parchment roll which he held struck the prisoner savagely in the face.

"Take care, Stoutenburg," ejaculated Beresteyn almost involuntarily.

"Take care of what?" retorted the other with a harsh laugh. "The fellow is helpless, thank Heaven! And I would gladly break my riding-whip across his impudent face."

He was livid and shaking with fury. Beresteyn, honestly fearing that in his blind rage he would compromise his dignity before his subordinates, dragged him by the arm away from the presence of this man whom he appeared to hate with such passionate intensity.

Stoutenburg, obdurate at first, almost drunk with his own fury, tried to free himself from his friend's grasp. He wanted to lash the man he hated once more in the face, to gloat for a while longer on the sight of his enemy, now completely in his power. But all around in the gloom he perceived figures that moved. The soldiers and mercenaries placed at his disposal by his friends were here in numbers; some of them had been put on guard over the prisoner by Jan, and others had joined them, attracted by loud voices.

Stoutenburg had just enough presence of mind left in him to realize that the brutal striking of a defenseless prisoner would probably horrify these men, who were fighters and not bullies, and might even cause them to turn from their allegiance to him.

So with a desperate effort he pulled himself together and contrived to give with outward calm some final orders to Jan.

"See that the ropes are securely fastened, Jan." he said. "Leave half a dozen men on guard; then follow me."

But to Beresteyn, who had at last succeeded in dragging him away from this spot, he said loudly—

"You do not know, Nicolaes, what a joy it is to me to be even with that fellow at last."

A prolonged laugh, that had a note of triumph in it, gave answer to this taunt, whilst a clear voice shouted lustily:

"Nay! We never can be quite even, my lord; since you were not trussed like a capon when I forced you to lick the dust."

CHAPTER XXXIII

PROTESTATIONS

HALF an hour later, the Lord of Stoutenburg was in Gilda's presence. He was glad enough that Nicolaes Beresteyn, afraid to meet his sister, had refused to

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accompany him. He, too, felt nervous and anxious at the thought of meeting her face to face at last. He had not set sight on her since that day in March when he was a miserable fugitive—in a far worse plight than was the wounded man tied with cords to a beam.

He had been a hunted creature then, every man's hand raised against him, his life at the mercy of any passer-by, and she had given him shelter freely and fearlessly—shelter and kind words; and her ministrations had brought him luck, for he succeeded in reaching the coast after he parted from her, and finding shelter once more in a foreign land.

Since then her image had filled his dreams by night and his thoughts by day. His earlier love for her, smothered by ambition, rose up at once stronger, more insistent than before; it became, during all these months of renewed intrigues and plots, the one ennobling trait in his tortuous character. His love for Gilda was in itself not a selfish feeling; neither ambition nor the mere gratification of obstinate desire entered in its composition.

He loved Gilda for herself alone, with all the adoration which a pious man would have given to his God, and while one moment of his life was occupied in planning a ruthless and dastardly murder, the other was filled with hopes of a happier future, with Gilda beside him as his idolized wife. But though his love was in itself pure and selfless, he remained true to his unscrupulous nature in the means which he adopted in order to win the object of his love.

Even now, when he entered her presence in the miserable peasant's hut where he chose to hold her a prisoner, he felt no remorse at the recollection of what she must have suffered in the past few days; his one thought was—now that he had her completely under his control—how he could best plead his cause first, or succeed in coercing her will if she proved unkind.

She received him quite calmly, and even with a gracious nod of the head; and he thought that he had never seen her look more beautiful than she did now, in her straight white gown, with that sweet, sad face of hers framed by a wealth of brown curls. In this squalid setting of white-washed walls and rafters blackened with age, she looked indeed, he thought, like one of those fairy Princesses held prisoner by a wicked ogre, of whom he used to read long ago when he was a child, before sin and treachery and that insatiable longing for revenge had wholly darkened his soul.

With bare head and back bent nearly double in the depth of his homage he approached his divinity.

"It is gracious of you, mejuffrouw, to receive me," he said, forcing his harsh voice to tones of gentleness.

"I had not the power to refuse, my lord," she replied quietly, "seeing that I am in your hands and entirely at your commands."

"I entreat you, do not say that," he rejoined eagerly. "There is no one here who has the right to command save yourself. 'Tis I am in your hands, and your most humble slave."

"A truce on this farce, my lord," she retorted impatiently. "I were not here if you happened to be my slave, and took commands from me."

" 'Tis true mayhap that you would not be here now, mejuffrouw," he said blandly, "but I could only act for the best and as speedily as I could. The moment I heard that you were in the hands of brigands I moved heaven and earth to find out where you were. I heard only this morning that you were in Rotterdam——"

"You heard that I was in the hands of brigands?" she murmured, almost gasping with astonishment. "You heard this morning that I was in Rotterdam?"

"I sent spies and messengers in every direction the moment I heard of the abominable outrage against your person," he continued with well feigned vehemence. "I can not even begin to tell you what I endured these past three days, until at last, by dint of ruse and force, I was able to circumvent the villains who held you captive and convey you hither in safety and profound respect, until such time as I can find a suitable escort to take you back to your father."

"If what you say is true, my lord, you could lend me an escort at once, that I might return to my dear father forthwith. Truly he must have broken his heart by now, weeping for me."

"Have I not said that I am your slave?" he rejoined gently. "If you desire to return to Haarlem immediately, I will see about an escort for you as quickly as may be. The hour is late now," he added hypocritically, "but a man can do much when his heart's desire lies in doing the behests of a woman whom he worships."

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Though she frowned at these last words of his, she leaned forward eagerly to him.

"You will let me go . . . At once—to-night?"

"At once if it lies in my power," he replied unblushingly, "but I fear me that you will have to wait a few hours: the night is as dark as pitch. It were impossible to make a start in it. Tomorrow, however——"

"Tomorrow?" she cried anxiously. "'Tis tonight that I wish to go."

"The way to Haarlem is long——" he murmured.

"'Tis not to Haarlem, my lord, but to Delft that I long to go."

"To Delft?" he exclaimed, with a perfect show of astonishment.

SHE bit her lip and for the moment remained silent. It had indeed been worse than folly to imagine that he, of all men in the world, would help her to go to Delft. But he had been so gentle, so kind, apparently so ready to do all that she asked, that for the moment she forgot that he and he alone was the mover of that hideous conspiracy of murder which she still prayed to God that she might avert.

"I had forgotten, my lord," she said, as tears threatened to choke her voice. "I had forgotten."

"Forgotten? What?" he asked blandly.

"That you are not like to escort me to Delft."

"Why not to Delft, if you wish to go there?"

"But," she murmured, "the Stadtholder——"

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "Now I understand. You are thinking of what you overheard in the cathedral of Haarlem."

"Indeed, how could I forget it?"

"Easily now, Gilda," he replied with solemn earnestness. "The plans which my friends and I formed on that night have been abandoned."

"Abandoned?"

"Yes! Your brother was greatly impressed by all that you said to him. He persuaded us all to think more lengthily over the matter. Then came the news of the outrage upon your person, and all thoughts of my ambition and of my revenge faded before this calamity. I have devoted every hour of mine existence since then to find you and to restore you to your home."

Bewildered, wild-eyed, Gilda listened to him. In all her life hitherto she had never come into contact with lying and with deceit; she had never seen a man lying unblushingly, calmly, not showing a single sign of confusion or of fear. Therefore the thought that this man could be talking so calmly, so simply, so logically, and yet be trying to deceive her, never for one moment entered her head.

The events of the past few days crowded in upon her brain in such a maddening array that, as she sat here now, face to face with the man whom she had been so ready to suspect, she could not disentangle from those events one single fact that could justify her suspicions.

Even looking back upon the conversation which she had had with that impudent rogue in Leyden and again last night, she distinctly remembered now that he had never really said a single thing that implicated the Lord of Stoutenburg or any one else in this villainy.

She certainly was bewildered and very puzzled now. Joy at the thought that after all the Stadtholder was safe, joy that her brother's hand would not be stained with murder, or his honor with treachery, mingled with a vague sense of mistrust which she was powerless to combat, yet felt ashamed to admit.

"Then, my lord," she murmured at last, "do you really tell me that the outrage of which I have been the victim was merely planned by villains, for mercenary motives?"

"What else could have prompted it?" he asked blandly.

"Neither you nor—nor any of your friends had a hand in it?" she insisted.

"I?" he exclaimed with a look of profound horror. "I—to do you such a wrong? For what purpose? Ye gods!"

"To—to keep me out of the way——"

"I understand," he said simply. "And you, Gilda, believed this of me?"

"I believed it," she replied calmly.

"You did not realize then that I would give every drop of my blood to save you one instant's pain?"

"I did not realize," she said more coldly, "that you would give up your ambition for any woman or for anything."

"You do not believe, then, that I love you?"

"Speak not of love, my lord," she retorted. "It is a sacred thing. And

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you, methinks, do not know what love is."

"Indeed you are right, Gilda," he said. "I do not know what is the love of ordinary men. But if to love you, Gilda, means that every thought, every hope, every prayer is centered upon you—if it means that neither sleep nor work nor danger can for one single instant chase your image from my soul—if to love you means that my very sinews ache with the longing to hold you in my arms, and that every moment which keeps me from your side is torture worse than hell; if love means all that, Gilda, then do I know to mine own hurt what love is."

"And in your ambition, my lord, you allowed that love to be smothered," she retorted calmly. "It is too late now to speak of it again to any woman save to Walburg de Marnix."

"I'll speak of it to you, Gilda, while the breath in my body lasts. Walburg de Marnix has already set me free."

"The law of God binds you to her. I pray you, speak no more of such things to me."

"You are hard and cruel, Gilda."

"I no longer love you."

"You will love again," he retorted confidently. "In the meanwhile, have I regained your trust?"

"Not even that wholly," she replied.

"LET me at least do one thing in my own justification," he pleaded. "Allow me to prove to you now and at once that, great though my love is for you, and maddening my desire to have you near me, I could not be guilty of such an outrage as I know that in your heart you do accuse me of."

"I did accuse you of it, my lord, I own. But how can you prove me wrong, now and at once?"

"By bringing before you the only guilty person in this network of infamy," he replied hotly.

"You know him, then?"

"For these three days now I and my faithful servants have tracked him. I have him here now, a prisoner, at last. His presence before you will prove to you that I at least bore no share in the hideous transaction."

"Of whom do you speak, my lord?" she asked.

"Of the man who dared to lay hands upon you in Haarlem——"

"He is here—now?" she exclaimed.

"A helpless prisoner in my hands," he replied. "Tomorrow summary justice shall be meted out to him, and he will receive the punishment which his infamy deserves."

"But he did not act on his own initiative," she said eagerly. "Another man more powerful, richer than he, prompted him—paid him—tempted him——"

Stoutenburg made a gesture of infinite contempt.

"So no doubt he has told you, Gilda. Men of his stamp are always cowards at heart, even though they have a certain brutish instinct for fighting—mostly in self-defense. He tried to palliate his guilt before you by involving me."

"You," she whispered under her breath, "or one of your friends."

"You mean your brother Nicolaes," he rejoined quietly. "Ah! The man is an even more arrant knave than I thought. So! He has tried to fasten the responsibility for this outrage against your person, first on me, who worship the very ground you walk on; secondly on the brother whom you love?"

"No, no," she protested eagerly. "I did not say that. It was I who——"

"Who thought so ill of me," broke in Stoutenburg with gentle reproach—"of me and of Nicolaes. You questioned the rogue, and he did not deny it; nay more, he enlarged upon the idea, which would place all the profits of this abominable transaction in his hands and yet exonerate him from guilt. But you shall question him yourself, Gilda. By his looks, by his answers, by his attitude you will be able to judge if I or Nicolaes, or any of our friends, have paid him to lay hands upon you.

"Remember, however," he added significantly, "that such a low-born knave will always lie to save his skin, so this do I entreat of you on my knees; judge by his looks more than by his words, and demand a proof of what he asserts."

"I will judge, my lord, as I think best," she retorted coldly. "And now, I pray you, send for the man. I would like to hear what he has to say."

In spite of her loyalty, her love for her brother, in spite of Stoutenburg's smooth assertions, a burning anxiety gnawed at her heart—she felt wretchedly, miserably lonely, with a sense of treachery encompassing her all around.

But there was a strange glow upon her

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face, which of a truth anxiety could not have brought about; rather must it have been inward anger, which assailed her whenever thoughts of the rogue whom she so hated intruded themselves upon her brain.

No doubt, too, the heat of the fire helped to enhance that delicate glow which lent so much additional beauty to her face and such additional brilliance to her eyes.

THE Lord of Stoutenburg immediately turned to obey Gilda's behest; there was a guard outside the door, and it was easy to send one of the men with orders to Jan to bring the prisoner hither.

Within himself he was frankly taken aback at Gilda's ready acquiescence—nay, obvious desire—to parley with the foreigner. A sharp pang of jealousy had shot through his heart when he saw her glowing eyes, her eagerness to defend the knave. The instinct that guided his fierce love for Gilda had quickly warned him that here was a danger of which he had never even dreamed.

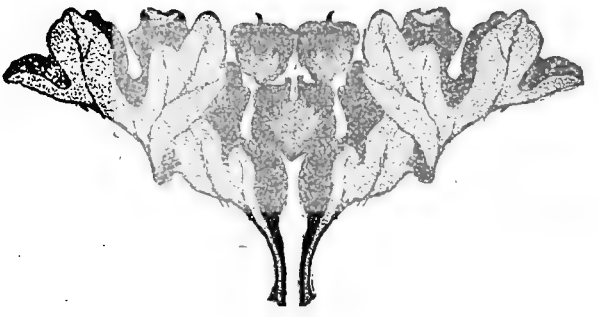
Women were easily swayed, he thought, by a smooth tongue and a grand manner; both of which, Stoutenburg was bound to admit, the rogue possessed in no scanty measure. Fortunately the mischief—if indeed mischief there was—had only just begun, and of a truth reason itself argued that Gilda must loathe and despise the villain who had wronged her so deeply. Moreover, Stoutenburg had every hope that the coming interview, if carefully conducted, would open Gilda's eyes still more to the true character of the foreign mercenary with the unctuous tongue and the chivalrous ways.

In any case the Lord of Stoutenburg himself had nothing to fear from that interview, and he felt that his own clever words had already shaken the foundations of Gilda's mistrust of him. Mayhap in desiring to parley with the knave she only wished to set her mind at rest finally on these matters, and also with regard to her own brother's guilt. Stoutenburg, with an inward grim smile of coming triumph, passed his hand over his doublet, where in an inner pocket reposed the parchment roll which was the last proof of Beresteyn's connivance.

Gilda did not know the cipher signature, and the knave would have some difficulty in proving his assertion, if indeed he dared to name Nicolaes at all; whilst if he chose to play the chivalrous part before Gilda, then the anonymous document would indeed prove of incalculable value. In any case, the complete humiliation of the knave who had succeeded in gaining Gilda's interest, if nothing more, was Stoutenburg's chief aim when he suggested the interview; and the document with the enigmatical signature could easily become a powerful weapon wherewith to make that humiliation more complete.

And thus musing, speculating, scheming, the Lord of Stoutenburg sent Jan over to the mill with orders to bring the prisoner under a strong guard to the jongejuffrouw's presence, whilst Gilda, silent and absorbed, sat on in the tiny room of the miller's hut.

TO BE CONCLUDED



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THE LEAVEN

by CAPTAIN GEORGE BRYDGES RODNEY U.S.A.

"THERE'S your point, sir." General Drayton's gantleted hand shot out toward the plain that lay hot and red and silent in the intense August light. The mirage swept heat-laden across the sand, and the *choyo* and mesquite nodded wearily to the touch of the desert wind.

Lofton looked steadily out into the sun glare toward the sharply defined pile of boulders at which his superior pointed. It stood out against the desert exactly as a cake of chocolate stands out upon a mahogany table—identical in color, discernible only by reason of its elevation against the sapphire sky.

"I suppose you know pretty well the condition of affairs?"

Lofton shook his head as he wiped his dripping forehead. It was too hot for unnecessary speech. The sweat-blackened horses drooped their heads, switching their tails at imaginary flies.

"Yonder—" the General swept his hand toward the west—"the Santa Catalina Mountains lie parallel to the coast. I had intended to cross them at Brush Creek Gap and be at hand to prevent the enemy from making his landing at Santiago Bay; but our Volunteer Cavalry, on which I had counted and which I had sent ahead to reconnoiter the place, did not play the game.

"They tried to hold the enemy off by themselves. It seems that Forbes was trying to make a reputation for himself just as so many did in the Spanish War. Always playing to the grandstand for individual recognition instead of subordinating everything to team work! It'll take a long time for men to get over the effect of the lessons that they learned then."

The tense lines about his mouth tightened.

"And so we got here too late. Here we are marching northward on the east side of the mountains, while the enemy is preparing to head southward on the opposite side as soon as he shall have effected his landing and have his base established at Santiago. Now that he knows we are here he will have to come through the pass yonder to drive us off, otherwise his lines of communication will be smashed.

"I will tell you what I intend to do, Captain Lofton. You are my Chief Signal Officer and must, of course, know what I propose to do in order to give me intelligent coöperation. I mean to do what is generally considered to be one of the most dangerous

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things to do in war. We are strong in cavalry and he is weak. He must be weak, when his horses have been for three weeks on shipboard.

"I mean to face to my left and let him attack me as I face the mountains. I know it is dangerous to fight parallel to my lines of communication. I know that the slightest success on his part will force me back into the desert——"

"If you do that, sir, and we are driven back, sir, even for a mile, we are defeat—— Good heavens, sir! As it is, we have only a small supply of water——"

"Don't restate the obvious, sir. Reiteration is no argument. And then, too, there is no room for argument. I know what I intend to do. Here is the kernel of the nut. The question is how can I do my utmost with the force at my command? How can I make the best showing with one weak division operating against two strong ones?

"Sometimes, Captain Lofton, it becomes necessary to take chances that would appal a gambler. You must remember that in all our forces, barring the cavalry and the artillery, there are not a thousand men with any previous service. You can not teach men how to lay a gun after they are under artillery fire. These men of ours know nothing of war. If they have ever had a week's drill at the Summer encampments of their State troops it is more than I suppose.

"The material is excellent; the men themselves are the best in the world. But you can not transform standing timber into polished boards overnight. It takes work, sir. You can't make bread without leaven.

"We've got to make the bread, and we're sadly lacking in leaven. There may be a time in our lives, sir, when it is necessary to know what is meant in the Bible where it says that a man must lose his life to save it. To give the force of example to men who have no idea of resistance to the very last—the bitter last. Wilson was defeated last week at Albania——"

"He did his best, sir——"

"He did not, sir. No man has done his best as long as he lives with his work undone. A hard rule, sir—a hard rule; but a soldier must be judged by the sole standard of success or failure. He must stand by that——"

He paused and stared out in silence across the desert. Behind them the marching columns reached out into the background like the fingers of an outstretched hand, the three Brigades of the Division, the guns, the cavalry and the interminable trains all heading for the Catalina range, behind whose sunlit mesas thousands of the enemy were pouring into the entrance of the pass to be disgorged later on to the plains at their feet.

It would come there after all—the first handgrip with the foe. The first fight that was to come would not be in any good campaigning country where the troops could get food and water, where the hospitals were at hand to care for the sick and wounded, and where their reserves would be well closed up to bear the brunt of conflict. This first battle, on which so much depended, would not be such a battle as military experts love to describe, where all works out by well established rules for the armed conflict between trained armies.

No. His force, willing as the men were, was nearly all Volunteers—men with absolutely no previous military training; men who had elected their own officers, and whose ideas of camp life were based on the Thursday during Encampment Week when the Governor of the State reviewed them and told them how good they were.

What head could these men make against a foe whose every man was a veteran? It would be fought, too, beyond the hope of aid, in the waste places of the earth, with the coyotes and the incurious Indians for the sole observers of the conflict.

General Drayton shook himself back into the present. In the terse sentences begot by years of discipline he outlined his plans to his attentive staff officer.

"I mean to draw in my cavalry and march with a small advance guard. Ten miles farther on I shall be taken by surprise. Do you understand? I shall be taken by surprise. When the enemy has heard from his patrols that I am marching against his flank and that I have left my lines of communication open to attack, I shall form my lines parallel to the railroad. He will see it, sir—they are quick at such things—he will not let such an opportunity go by. And he will by all the laws of human probability advance to push me off the line of the railroad, to drive me back with all our force into the desert where we shall be hopelessly defeated——"

"And then, sir?"

"And then you, sir, will place ten men

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on that rocky knoll yonder with a wireless outfit; and when you signal them from our lines, after the enemy has been committed irretrievably to his assault, the party with the wireless will send word to Buxton's cavalry to cross the range.

"I know that there is no pass, sir. You need not dwell upon it. How shall he get over? —— it, sir! Am I the Almighty to answer questions like that? I don't know *how* he will get across the ridge, but I know Buxton. He will not ask questions. He will strike and get over the range yonder; and by the blessing of God he will hit their lines of communication on the other side of the hills and break them as you would break the sticks of a lady's fan, and so seize the pass behind them. And then I shall turn upon him in front and——

"The whole gist of the matter, Captain Lofton, is that the signal detachment that you place upon that knoll must clearly understand that its duties do not really begin until the fight is on. They must remain hidden—absolutely concealed—until you signal them with a flag to the effect that the enemy has been committed to the attack upon me. In that moment Buxton will cross; the enemy can not withdraw troops to recross the range.

"I can not send a large body to hold that knoll. The very presence of a company, even, would betray the importance of the place. There is no other place from which a message can reach Buxton. No; the party must remain concealed till the last moment; then send the message——"

"Shall they return then, sir?"

GENERAL DRAYTON'S face set sternly.

"If they can," he said. "I fear, though, that they will be cut off. One thing must be clearly understood. The ten men that you send there must understand that it is a forlorn hope; and that whatever happens, no failure can be pardoned or condoned.

"The party must wait till the head of the enemy's rear guard has debouched from the pass. It will take Buxton three hours to get across and strike. Whom can you put in charge of the party?"

"I think I had better go myself, sir."

"No. I shall need you. Send Major Black. He is in charge of the Volunteer Signal detachment, is he not?"

"Yes, sir. And he is a very good man, too. I will send him and Sergeant Le Grange——"

"Who is he?"

"He was in the Cavalry for eighteen years. Black says he is an old fogy with antiquated ideas of discipline that would have delighted Frederick the Great. He is the best man we have."

"See to it, then."

They turned the willing horses and plodded wearily back through the red-hot sands to the single tent fly that was pitched beneath a giant mesquite bush. Regiment by regiment the force came up. Followed a clang and rattle as whole company columns dropped prone in the dust, for they had learned to make the most of even a few moments' rest.

There was little rest that night for General Drayton. To be certain that Lofton clearly understood his plans he sent for him again and went painfully over each little detail that might seem obscure; while his Chief of Staff sat by, deep in thought, his busy pencil jotting down the notes that were to form the basis for the morrow's fight.

Finally word came to Lofton:

Send word to Buxton to start. It is time for him to get into position so that we will be ready to move when he gets his final orders.

A weary aide stumblingly found his way between the smoking greasewood fires where the tired infantry lay talking the idle talk of utter exhaustion, to where Colonel Buxton sat chatting with his adjutant. The order was given and acknowledged.

"Tell General Drayton that I understand and will promptly execute his orders. Captain Orme, you will personally notify the regimental commanders to have their men saddle up at once and move out by the rear to Rocky Mount. There must be no trumpet calls, Orme. Everything must be as quiet as the grave."

Barring a muttered oath or two from a weary trooper, angry at being ordered out again after only an hour's rest, there was no noise and but little confusion; and in twenty minutes the muffled thunder of hoofs upon the sand told the wondering camp that the cavalry was again in motion.

"Where 'n —— are we goin' to now?"

"*I* don't keer a —— fer California, no ways, an' I ain't ever goin' to love another country, anyhow. A patriot's nothin' but a

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half-baked fool at best, an' any one who loves a land like I do this one 's a plain garden variety of —— fool. If you love a girl all you git 's a heartache; if you love a country you git a belly ache, an' that's worse. Sayin' nothin' of a couple of chafed heels. I reckon we'll be busy soon——"

Buxton was busy, but it was work with an ultimate end in view. Lofton, too, was busy getting ready to despatch Black with his Volunteer detachment to sit down upon that pile of red-hot rocks that the General had designated as a good place—not to sit down, but as a good place for the signal station.

He found the detachment of the State troops sleeping under a clump of mesquite bushes. Kicking a recumbent figure in the ribs, he roared:

"Hi, you! Who are you? Where'll I find Major Black?"

A quiet-voiced soldier stepped from the fire.

"I beg the Captain's pardon," he said, saluting, "but that's the Major there he's kickin'."

"When did he get here?"

"About an hour since, sir. Shall I waken him, sir?"

"Yes. You are Sergeant Le Grange, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir——"

The sleeping officer arose, rubbing his eyes sullenly. No man is in a good temper when suddenly aroused from sleep on campaign.

"Chief's orders, Black. He desires you to take Sergeant Le Grange and ten men and occupy that knoll."

He pointed to the pile of boulders that stood out mountain size against the sky.

"You will establish your wireless station on its summit, but do not run up your mast until the last possible moment; and that will be when you see me wave a red flag from the sand ridge yonder. Buxton has moved out with all his cavalry to get into position to make a break to cross the mountain yonder in the enemy's rear, when you send him a message from the hill yonder that the time has come.

"If you raise your mast too soon you will betray your position. Buxton has his wireless outfit, and the Old Man depends upon you to stay upon that hill at all hazards till you send the message to Buxton. *Sabe?*"

Black nodded soberly, his eyes blinking in the firelight.

"Stay there as long as I can," he said quietly.

"No such thing!" snapped Lofton. "You will stay there until you have sent the message and have had it acknowledged. Is that clear?"

"As clear as Missouri river water in April," growled Black. "Nice, sweet-scented job we're let in for. I want you to understand, Lofton, that I don't like this a little bit. I ain't any more afraid than any one else is, but where's the use in losin' the ten men that we'll lose by this? Why don't you take fifteen-dollars-a-month men from the infantry instead of this outfit of mine?

"Oh, yes—you'll hear of it again after this war is over. We'll see if the country is goin' to stand for havin' her sons killed in merciless war——"

Unconsciously he assumed an imposing attitude.

"Oh, go to ——, Black," said Lofton cheerfully. "That goes fine before a Carnegie Peace Commission. Pull your freight. Git. Get your mules, Sergeant Le Grange."

They were brought up quickly and were deftly loaded by the men working under the lash of Le Grange's tongue, well laid on. Ten minutes did the work—ten minutes that Lofton spent in tramping up and down, pulling nervously at his mustache.

"Detachment ready, sir."

Le Grange's hand snapped up in salute. Major Black settled his belt and field glasses and grunted:

"All right. Go ahead, sergeant."

Then to Lofton he said curtly:

"If I ever get back from that place, Lofton, I'll have something to say about the way the Army does things that'll attract attention. 'Night."

And he plodded off into the darkness, while Lofton focused his glasses on the throat of the pass where a myriad of sparks against the sky showed that the enemy was on the move.

"They're movin' into position under cover of night," he muttered. "The General must know this. I hope Black isn't discovered——"

BLACK was not discovered. Intent on his work, but furiously angry at being given such work to do, he disappeared in the night, Sergeant Le Grange in the advance, the mules and men

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following in ghostly silence in and out among the mesquite till they came at last to the foot of that boulder-built hill.

Three hundred feet it towered above the plain, huge boulders roughly thrown on top of each other, difficult to climb in the darkness. Painfully they made the ascent by a tortuous trail that was found and kept only by falling into it and then keeping actual touch of hands; and daylight found them cached in a tiny crater on the very summit of the hill.

The steel mast, its sections run together with the guy wires ready attached, lay with its heel against a huge rock where it could be instantly swung into position. The mules had been deftly thrown among the rocks and the men had sought out the little patches of shade where they threw themselves, prone on the gravel, their rifles under them that no telltale gleam of sun on steel should betray their presence on the hill. Slowly the sun crept up above the mesquite and hung poised over Twin Buttes behind them.

"Look! There they come!"

Le Grange's forefinger stabbed the sun glare. A dozen tiny black figures moved fanwise out of the gorge of the pass and spread across the plain. Behind these came others and still others. These were the contact patrols sent out to locate the enemy and to send back word to their supports, those silent blocks of men moving in columns across the yellow sands of the foothills. Nearer and nearer they seemed to crawl, and still Drayton gave no sign. Sergeant Le Grange stirred uneasily.

"Look behind us, sir."

Major Black turned quickly. They were green troops, it is true, those khaki-clad columns that he watched deploying into battle line along the sand hills behind him; and the artillery, which undoubtedly was swinging into position somewhere behind them, was also composed of new men. The reserve bill to help the Army had passed the last Congress, but the men would not remain without larger pay; so the first line of the Army, which is the regular force in time of war, was depleted.

He knew that these men, man for man, were better than any in the world, yet—there was no leaven. Even he realized that. What he did not know was that one can make his own leaven.

"They're good troops," he said appreciatively; "the best that the State has."

"They ain't blooded yit." The man who was turning the generator spat into the palms of his hands. "The yeast ain't riz yit. It'll come if they have time, but Gawd help them that's bein' cooked in the bakin'.

"You, Clark, Davis, Alston! Get your rifles quick! Look, sir——"

Le Grange's voice was chilled steel now.

"It's just as I thought, sir. They ain't goin' to lose a bet. They mean to take this hill themselves. It's the only available signal station, an' it's as good fer them as fer us. What orders, sir?"

The black line of a company column wound its way across the plain at their feet, heading toward the base of the hill. It came slowly, with scouts thrown well forward, as a man passes his hand along a wall in the darkness. Its intent was obvious.

"Take all the men that you can spare," said Major Black slowly, "and place them along the crest. Don't wait for short-range firing. When they get close under the hill you won't be able to see them. What do you make the range, sergeant?"

"Eleven hundred yards, I think, sir."

"All right. You can commence your firing when you get the men placed. The rest of you men sway up the mast. There may not be time enough to get it up if we wait."

The appearance of the gleaming finger of steel shining in the morning sunlight was the signal. Up to that moment the enemy was not certain that the hill was occupied; but now the half-mile hail of the bullets pattered viciously among the rocks.

Right and left along the line ran the ripple of the file firing, and the men ducked low behind the protecting rocks. They knew right well, for no one is quicker in his perceptions than the private soldier, that the enemy could not "shoot them out of the position," to use a military term, but that the attack upon the hill must terminate in an actual assault; and to do that they must come up that narrow trail in single file.

The four men toiled at the generator crank, Black eagerly scanning the American lines for some sign of the red flag that was to be his signal to tell Buxton to loose three thousand sabers in a charge that should cut the enemy from his base as the knife cuts the clam from the rocks. Would it never come?

"Morton's down, sergeant."

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He was—falling as a tree falls, among the hot rocks, with a bullet through the head.

Two minutes later a bullet ripped through Baker's stomach as he bent over the crank of the generator. He shrieked and fell. There was still no sign from the long brown ridge behind them. It did not even reply to the muffled thunder of the artillery firing that was shaking them from the mouth of the pass.

Up, up, up toiled the column, the three men among the rocks firing steadily from among the boulders, browning the mass of the column as it approached. Here and there men fell prone upon the hot sands or threw up their hands and staggered out of the ranks wounded, till the plain was dotted with little black spots that marked the firing from the hill. Still the company toiled on till it reached at last the protecting cover of the first line of rocks at the base of the hill, three hundred yards away.

Even the rocks had given the defenders only partial shelter. Le Grange, with a bullet through his shoulder, swore in all the tongues of the Pentecost. Morton, Baker and Ames were dead behind their rocks, each in a little semicircle of empty shells. The four men still cranked at the generator to produce and maintain the life-giving current that was to spit its command to Buxton, and still they saw the enemy debouch by hundreds from the pass.

They saw, jerking up their heads with the swing of the crank, their own men, surging to and fro in their lines as green troops do under artillery fire; they saw the white tufts of the fleecy shrapnel strung along the plain, and they marked the approaching attack of the foe as it developed increasing weight and volume for the final rush that was to carry Drayton's position and force him back into the waterless desert behind him.

In that pitiless heat of the sub-tropic day the roar of the firing sounded like the far-off beat of heavy surges on the long sea beaches. When that line should close to two hundred yards all would be over—so said Major Black.

"I was lookin' fer that!"

Jones fell prone across the axle of the generator wheel and Burke sat down hard, sobbing as a man does when shot through the chest. The wheel swung back, settled and died and the needle on the indicator settled back toward zero. The current was dying. There were not men enough left to run that wheel and still to keep off the attack till the message could be sent to Buxton. The message, when signaled for, could not be sent, and Drayton's effort would be all in vain.

BLACK saw it all, and his face turned white. No man cares to contemplate failure in his work; and he had just begun to appreciate, when he saw those men die about him, what this detail of his meant. It meant the life or death of the army behind him. Well—it could not be helped now; that much was very clear——

"That's all, sergeant! We can do no more. We have done our best. Take shelter where you can till I wave what's left of my shirt. I'll try to get them to understand that we surrender."

"Sir!" Le Grange stared at him incredulously. "Surrender?"

The Major was busy in stripping off a shirt that was long past all days of whiteness. Even as he struggled with the reluctant tail of it about his head, he felt himself seized and fell upon his face, prostrate among the rocks. He freed his head and spat out the sand to find Sergeant Le Grange sitting back against a rock, revolver in hand and the muzzle pointed undeviatingly at his—Black's—ribs.

"Here! What does this nonsense mean? Drop that gun and do as I tell you."

"I will, sir—after a bit. Get to that wheel, Major! God knows 'tis disrespect I'm showin' you, but you're interferin' with me an' my work. Get to the wheel yonder and *turn!* Turn! Get up, sir, I say. If I speak again I'll shoot——"

Major Black arose slowly, dirt and gravel in his mouth, the sweat of anger on his face and his whole body trembling with passion.

"You shall pay for this, Sergeant Le Grange! If there's law in the United States you shall pay for this to the limit. I'll see what a—a general court martial will——"

"In the mean time, sir, you'll turn that wheel."

He stopped. Cap-crowned heads began to show among the boulders, and they could see their foes moving toward the narrow little trail that they must win to enter the crater where the wireless outfit stood. But Sergeant Le Grange was not even looking at them. He took one short lightning glance

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at Major Black and Black's assistants, Wilson and Burke, frenziedly turning the wheel of Sisyphus, and turned then toward the lines of the American troops.

"There it is! There it is! The red flag!" he shouted tensely. "See it, Major? Now, sir, go to it! Get to your instrument. I'll gain you the time——"

He jerked the dripping Volunteer from the crank and fairly hurled him at the instrument.

"I'll gain you the time to send the message," he said again. "There's not a round of ammunition left in the belts, but I'll gain you the time. You two men keep that wheel goin' if you bust yourselves wide open in doin' it! Give me the ax!"

Dazed and astounded, the two tired men watched the Major, the Major with a new lease on life who flung himself face down upon the brown box, fingering delicately the plugs; and they saw, as they bent over their heart-breaking task, the crack and flash of the long blue spark that crackled viciously as it sought for Buxton across the scorching sky.

They were so much interested in that that they did not notice Le Grange who, ax in hand, stumbled haltingly to the crest of the trail just in time to spring upright, ax over shoulder, as the first man of the attacking column sprang at him up the path, his bayonet at the charge.

No time was there to think of self-protection. Down swung the ax to cut, as one cuts cheese, the bayonet from the steel barrel; and back it swung, pendulum-wise, the heavy head catching the man fairly under the ear. No time was there for half-arm cutting; but ever, as they rushed, the little figure sprang forward—always forward to meet them as they came; and his uncouth weapon, circling right and left, marked for him a grisly circle.

The sharp turn in the trail made it impossible for more than one man to attack at a time. There was no room for the enemy to shoot, for he no sooner turned the sharp corner of the narrow patht han Le Grange was on him, with the ax always at the throat of the advancing foe ere the point of the bayonet shot around the turn. Breathless, worn and wounded as he was, the gray-headed old soldier was the very embodiment of war—stone-age war, when men fought with axes; prehistoric war, when men fought not to save their own skins, but to inflict their mark upon the foe. Dimly he was aware of a shout from Burke, who sprang from the machine as the handle swung back, catching him under the chin and throwing him twenty feet. Vaguely he heard a roar far below him on the plain, where a mountain howitzer roared and jumped back as it spat its mouthful of iron up and at them. Semi-unconsciously he heard Major Black shriek out above the turmoil of the fight:

"All right, sergeant! · All right, Le Grange! It's gone. They've got it——"

And then the mouth of hell gaped at his feet, the flames spurting into his very face; and he toppled over backward as a tree falls as the shell from that mountain howitzer burst in the very center of the crater.

The wildly waving red flag in the American lines dropped. It had done its work; and Buxton's wireless, like a village gossip, loosed the cords of circumstance.

No one saw that cavalry column as it headed up arroyos, traversed hogbacks, scrambled along perfectly impassable hillsides, always at the trot or gallop, till finally it debouched into a cañon, but on the west side of the great main range. No one saw that column swing northwestward, or, if any one did see it, the fact was never reported.

No one save Buxton's men themselves saw what happened, but General Drayton and his staff saw a sudden swirling rush in the mouth of the pass; saw the sticks of the fan, already far out upon the plain, draw in and gradually close, saw bodies of infantry clamber up the jaws of the pass to hold it for the retreat of the attacking line that must retrace its way through those rocky paths. They saw and noted the quick rush of the withdrawal; and once there came to them, on the hot wind of the desert, a cheer, the import of which every cavalryman knows.

General Drayton heard it and, smiling grimly, gave a curt command. His Chief of Artillery heard it, and his trumpets sang his guns forward in the mad whirling rush of an advance by battalion, the tired horses galloping under a cloud of dust and curses. The sweating, toiling lines of tired infantry heard it and swung forward cheering toward that pass, now a swirling vortex of retiring troops.

Major Black, dabbing at a bayonet wound with a dirty shirt, heard it and grinned feebly as he crawled over to Le

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Grange, rolled him over and, prying open his mouth, poured down his throat the last drop of whisky from his flask.

"You were right, sergeant, and I was wrong," he said pluckily. "You were right. It's in your teachin', I reckon—cavalry teachin'—to get somethin' done. The General said yesterday he needed leaven to leaven his lump. Look now, his lump's broken up into crumbs——"

He pointed to the badly broken line beneath him as it swung roaring up the pass.

"But the leaven is workin'. Oh, yes! It's workin'."

"We worked, too, sir," growled Burke through his broken jaw. "We worked too, sir."

"That's what I mean," said the Volunteer Major slowly, as one who has seen a great light. "I'm speakin' of the leaven. You're all of you a part of it. Sergeant Le Grange, I——there will be no mention of a court martial. You have taught me a lesson."

To the eternal surprise of Major Black, Chief Signal Officer of a great State, the little, gray-haired ex-cavalryman drew himself up and saluted quietly.

"I'm afraid, sir, that crack on the Major's head injured him. Everything's all right here. The Major had an order to stay here and send a message, an' he done it. That's all, sir. You done it. An' there ain't nothin' more to be said, sir."

Major Black gasped, gulped, and held out his hand.

THE TROUBLE COMPANY

by

CARL MATTISON CHAPIN

IT IS bad business to tighten the screws of discipline upon the son of a majority member of the Honorable Board of Fire Commissioners. John Hannegan had been in the Fire Department long enough to know that it was bad business. As a matter of fact he knew very well just how bad business it was when he did it. But the boy had really presumed beyond even that long-suffering patience which thirty-five years of submission to the vagaries of political control had conferred upon Captain John, along with the grizzle in his hair and beard and the scars upon his body.

So the cub came before his father and his father's fellow Commissioners, under charges of drunkenness and striking an officer—a living testimonial to the outrageous presumption of a mere Captain with political principles out of all sympathy with the ruling majority in Mill City

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municipal affairs." The cub was permitted to resign under fire and Captain Hannegan was, presently, requested in due form and order to transfer his belongings and his tactless disposition to the quarters of Engine 13, the Trouble Company down in the malodorous precincts of the Leather District.

The Trouble Company was an evolution, not a creation. Starting its unenviable career no one remembers just how, it slowly but surely drew upon its kind until it came to be recognized, all but officially, as the ultimate limbo of the incorrigible trouble maker.

Its Captains came and went as the exigencies of politics forced penance or conferred relief upon them. A few had battled with the Trouble Company for their allotted term and emerged, with honors more or less even, to resume their departmental careers under happier auspices, but by far the greater proportion had found Engine 13 the transfer point to the calmer abodes of civil life. Certainly none had ever succeeded in making an appreciable impression upon the disposition of the company itself.

John Hannegan, being possessed of sensibilities, a heart and an under allowance of self-confidence, had reason to view his prospects with a troubled mind. In two weeks his nerves were in tatters and the abode of the Trouble Company was a cross between Bedlam and a home for dipsomaniacs. Twice it had reported upon the fire ground without men enough to stretch a lead of hose. The majority members of the Honorable Board of Fire Commissioners were frankly beside themselves with joy, while John's superior officers were beginning to wonder how much longer they could shield him without risking their own official heads.

FORTUNATELY his annual vacation intervened, and, as usual, he packed his troubles with his citizen's clothes and departed for Magnopolis to confide in Bill Tighson. Bill commanded a fire-boat company in the larger city and he commanded it with two fists like petrified hams and a heart tender enough, perhaps, but encased in a harveyized jacket utterly trouble proof.

So much of Bill's life had been spent afloat that he knew politics only as a paltering diversion of landlubbers—like this game of golf or the foolish practise of bathing in salt water. When politics drew near he slapped his expansive hands and said "scat" and though politics might arch its spine and spit a little, it always backed away in the end and left him in peace. Bill seldom knew whether the Commissioner of the moment was Democrat, Republican or Prohibitionist, and he cared less. In brief, he didn't give a hoot whether he held his job or not; he had been ready to retire any time these fifteen years.

So long as he held it, however, he held it with both hands. He asked of his men only that they keep the boat refulgent as the sun, abstain from strong drink and follow him wherever he chose to lead—which last was putting something of a strain upon human limitations. Bill's methods of discipline were all his own and they exhaled a pungent odor of the Seven Seas which the regulations scarcely contemplated. But they were effective. His men occasionally died violently in the line of their duty. Quite frequently they resigned, and almost every water-front fire that passed the first-alarm stage sent some of them to the hospital. But never in the history of Bill Tighson's command had a man from his company appeared on the Headquarters carpet.

Bill settled his own rows and he seldom had to settle more than one with the same man. And as fast as one vacancy followed another—which was pretty fast—a new trouble maker from uptown packed his kit into Bill Tighson's bailiwick. In brief, Bill possessed a Trouble Company of his own and never tumbled to the fact until Captain John had spun his tale of wo.

"Trouble Company," he chuckled. "Sa-ay, that's a good one. Sa-ay, I betchuh I got a Trouble Company here, myself. And I never knew it. Come on, I want to look at 'em."

Still chuckling he led the way aloft to the roof garden where his crew sprawled beneath the awning, blasphemous and perspiring. He grinned about on them while they eyed him apprehensively.

"Sa-ay," he remarked, "I gotchuh classified. You're trouble makers, ain't yuh? This is the real, old, original Trouble Company, huh?"

He laughed aloud and they laughed with him—like a pack of ugly bulldogs receiving

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a kindly pat where they expected a blow from the hand they fear and worship.

"The old, original Trouble Company," he repeated affectionately as he tramped downstairs again. Back in the office, however, his face sobered.

"You don't go at it right, Jack," he said. "You can't treat these trouble makers like you would firemen or human beings. They don't understand it. The only thing they know is trouble and the only man they're afraid of is the man kin make trouble for them faster 'n they kin make it for him. Now look at this bunch here—new one coming along down every ten days or so, fresh as a daisy. And the first thing I says to him is, 'Git your coat off and swab them decks.'

"Then, when he gives me the ha-ha, as he most usually does, I take him by the scruff of the neck and use the seat of his pants for a swab. After that, if he's still bothered with a divine call to talk to me I run a fist down his throat and twist it. I don't know anything more discouragin' to frivolous conversation than a fist in the gullet."

He surveyed his own weapon and smiled reminiscently.

"That's well enough for you, Bill," Hannegan answered mournfully, "but if those fellows ever got a thing like that on me they'd have my scalp in no time."

Tighson broke in impatiently:

"Git something on them first. I got sixteen men on the roster right now and I could jail fifteen of 'em without taking my feet off this desk—all the way from petty larceny to manslaughter. The other lad I ain't got nothing on yet, but he's got a guilty conscience and thinks I have. Try it anyhow. You're as good a man as I am, any day—stand up here!"

He dragged Hannegan to the mirror and stood shoulder to shoulder with him.

"Looka there, now," he went on, indicating the points of resemblance in the glass as he spoke. "I ain't got an inch on you anywhere—shoulders, chest, fists, anything. Why, you even got the same mean squint in your eyes and the crosspatch crease between 'em, and you're hair for hair as gray as I am—though mebbe that don't signify. And if you'd shave that bunch of alfalfa off your chin, your jaw would—— Say, by golly, Jack, if you'd come out of them bushes no one'd ever know you wasn't me. You'd be a dead ringer. Sa-ay, by the the—by the——"

He grew inarticulate from great joy and beat John Hannegan on the shoulders.

"Sa-ay, Jack, by golly I got it! Sa-ay, listen to me, will yuh? I got a vacation comin' about the time yours gits through. I'll just go down and reason with that Trouble Company of yours for a couple of weeks if you'll lay low and amputate that angora stuff before you come back—aw, sure I can; what's eatin' yuh? Don't I know Amos Barker like a brother? Sa-ay, he'll rise to it like a bullhead in a bass pond. You leave it to me; I'll tell them lambs of yours I've shaved my physog. the better to bite their domes off and, believe *me*, they won't have much leisure to study my face. Ring the joybells! That's just what I need to tone me up."

AMOS BARKER, who was Big Chief of the Mill City Department, rose even as Bill had predicted. He rose so high that the exaltation of his letter convinced even the doubting Captain John. They went back to Mill City two days before the expiration of Hannegan's leave—he with his face as smooth as Bill Tighson's own and startlingly like it. They spent the two days lurking near the quarters of the Trouble Company until Bill had learned the name, face and disposition of every man in the Company.

At breakfast, the second morning, they read of a fire in a wholesale jewelry establishment the night before. Fire officials believed, so the story ran, that the blaze had been kindled by thieves, either to cover their tracks or to give them an opportunity to work. At any rate a considerable quantity of silver had been missing when the excitement subsided.

"That 13's fire?" Tighson queried.

"Ought to be if they didn't sleep over," answered Hannegan.

"Probably stayed to wash down, eh?"

"Most likely."

"Well, let's go down and see that eight o'clock bunch go to breakfast."

The "eight o'clock bunch" was a lean, ratty youth who slunk past their hiding-place about as ostentatiously as the conscious model for a police poster.

"Tim Muldoon," whispered Hannegan. "He's the walking delegate of the Trouble Union."

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"He stirs curiosity within me," remarked Tighson. "I can't keep my eyes off him. Let's sleuth him."

They sleuthed the furtive one for many devious blocks and were rewarded by seeing him duck into a low-browed pawnshop in a sinister street.

"Ha-ha for you, Timmy Muldoon!" chuckled Tighson. "I see gales and gales of joy a-makin' on the horizon."

Next morning, clad in John Hannegan's uniform, Bill Tighson strolled into 13's quarters at the hour of rollcall. A haggard lieutenant was vainly struggling to muster his crew long enough to run over the roster and read the day's assignments. His every vocal effort roused a chorus of guffaws and obscenity from every corner of the house.

"Excuse me," remarked Tighson in his smoothest drawing-room voice, which had a radius of something less than a mile on a calm day. "If I'm buttin' in, please excuse me."

No one seemed able to place him; but the men watched, apprehensive of what this visitation might portend. The haggard lieutenant advanced, stammering and uncertain.

"Yes," said Tighson, "I'm the Captain; somewhat changed, perhaps, but still the Captain. The beard which you seem to miss has been removed and the spirit has, I believe, been born anew. Now that don't mean I'm a babe in arms; I don't want to start out under false pretenses."

The Trouble Company was frankly amazed; frankly unable to determine where it was at. For a moment there was utter silence while Bill Tighson beamed about him. Then, from way back behind the tender, rose a shrill voice:

"Good gosh, it's old Ginger Whiskers and the reaper's got to him finally—Z-Z-Z-Z-Z-Z-Z-Z-Z-Z-Z-zzzzz!"

The speaker evidently had not intended to become too closely identified with this remark. But Bill Tighson's eye was as quick as his memory was retentive. He shot one glance at the figure receding into the shadows by the stable door.

"Muldoon, come here!"

His voice was still smooth, but the banter had gone from it. There was no sound of answer or movement from the shadows behind the tender. Bill dropped his traveling bag and strode down the floor. Muldoon tried to dodge him around the apparatus, but Bill was too swift. His hand fell upon Muldoon's neck and he emerged into the light with the ratty one trailing behind him like a pennant. He snapped the offender upright while the rest of the crew fought the mental fight between natural inclination and a half-formed suspicion that things were somehow subtilely changed.

"Now, you pasty-faced cigarette sucker, don't you like my face?"

He thrust a chin as stubby and solid as the face of a sledge hammer into Muldoon's countenance as he went on:

"Sa-ay, you're goin' to like it less as we proceed, if you don't take a tumble to yourself pretty quick. What you need is exercise; your animal spirits is too copious for your capacity. There's a couple sets of harness look like they ain't been cleaned in two weeks. When we get this rollcall out of our systems you just get a box of paste and work some of the joy out of your organization. If you get 'em done quick I'll let you do 'em over again; if you don't get 'em done quick I'll tell you some more about it. Fall in!"

"That ain't my job," squealed the Rat.

"That is your job," the Captain answered evenly.

"It ain't."

"Somebody's lyin' here," observed Tighson, turning to the Company at large. "Who's the liar, Muldoon, you or me?"

"I don't give a cuss; I don't clean no harnesses; see?"

Tighson's jaw shot forward and his teeth clenched.

"Yuh don't, huh? Yuh sneakin' little sea lawyer! Come here!"

With a sweep of the arm Bill caught Muldoon again by the back of his neck and dragged him close. Bill poised his right fist for a blow; then lowered it with a snort of disgust.

"Pah! Yuh jellyfish! Yuh'd smear all over the place if I hit yuh. Come here to me!"

He bent Muldoon across his knee and applied the leathery palm with vigor to the area which nature hath thereunto appointed. The Rat squealed, as much in pain as in anger, for Tighson's hand was not greatly different from an oak slab. The Trouble Company first stared aghast, then chuckled, then laughed with the bloodthirsty mirth of its kind.

Tighson finished his task with deliberation,

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utterly unmoved by Muldoon's contortions. He set the red-faced, choking victim on his feet and looked him in the eye. Muldoon could not meet the glance. He fixed his eyes on the floor and struggled for utterance.

"I'll fix yuh," he croaked. "You wait till I tell Alderman Dolan. I'll fix yuh! Yuh hit me an' yuh know the rules."

"Fairly well," returned Tighson, calmly; "and that ain't all I know, Timmy, either."

He bent forward and whispered in Muldoon's ear—only a word or two, but the man's face went pasty white and he gulped in his throat.

"Now fall in," said Tighson.

Muldoon, turning to obey, cast him a look so venomous that Tighson halted him yet again, gripping him by the arm and speaking at large:

"This inside information I been giving you, Timmy, is just between you and me so long as everything goes all right. But if anything should happen to me, suddenlike—say a friendly hand to help me down an elevator shaft some night—and if my lawyer should happen to look over my papers after the funeral; well, I wouldn't be around to stop him using his own judgment, you know. Do you get me, Timmy?"

Muldoon slunk to his place. Tighson called the roll and read a new list of assignments, prepared under Hannegan's supervision and calculated to put the worst trouble makers where the work was thickest. When he had finished he said, smoothly:

"Quite a flicker you had down in the jewelry place the other night. Must have been an awful hot fire."

"You bet it was," growled Pete Benton, a giant who took to laziness and trouble as naturally as the sparks fly upward.

"Took you most all night to wash down, didn't it? Well, that was tough."

He paused, but suspicion bred silence.

"But it has its compensations, at that. It sure must have been a hot one——" His tone trailed off dreamily as if he were concentrating on the problem of just how hot such a fire could be. "Why, they tell me it was so hot it burned up five hundred dollars' worth of solid silver so clean they never even found the ashes. Now what do you know about that?"

The implication of his tone was that they knew all about it and he swept an appraising eye down the uneasy line.

"Pitch in, now," he said, in a matter-of-fact tone. "The place'll stand a lot of work."

HE PICKED up his bag and departed for the regions above. As soon as he had gone there was an anxious conference of Muldoon's "gang," which comprised Pete Benton, a man named Deluccia, affectionately known as Lucy; a foreigner whose Americanized name was Bronkiewitz — softened to Bronk — and another youth of the rat genus who was known as Spoodles. This quintet, bound together by the bonds of coöperative evildoing, was the fountainhead of most of the trouble in the Company.

Of the others, Red Hurley, as big a man as Pete Benton and more instinctively vicious than any of them, played a lone hand and was nearly as unpopular with his mates as with his officers. There were, besides, two nonentities who acted as volunteer chorus whenever the trouble became thick enough for them to mingle without undue individual peril. The engineer and his understudy, having been chosen to office for characteristics more mechanical than political, minded their own business. The lieutenant, who would scarcely have ventured to claim proprietorship of his own soul, completed the list of eleven with whom Tighson had to deal.

"What d'yeh make of that?" Pete Benton demanded.

"I make it that ain't Goat Hannegan, that's what I make it," snapped Muldoon.

"Detective, maybe," put in Lucy. There was an inflection of hopeful doubt, as if the suggestion were made to be disproved, but for an instant it struck the group completely aback. They stared at each other's blanched faces. Pete Benton was the first to recover his poise.

"Detective nothin'! That guy's a fireman, all right. And if it ain't Goat how's he know our names and everything; huh? He don't belong in this Department—aw, it's Goat, all right, and somebody's been givin' him a steer to haze us. We never seen Goat without his beard—aw, we kin put the kibosh on that game, all right."

"You heard what he said about the lawyer and the papers," Muldoon broke in, with the hint of fear in his voice.

"That's a bluff," said Lucy with conviction.

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"Sure," echoed Bronk. "He ain't got nothin' on us."

"He's got it on me, all right," squeaked Muldoon. "He seen me goin' into the hockshop."

"The dooce he did!" gasped Pete. "Well, he ain't got anything on me."

Pete became suddenly reconciled to the fate which had left him out of the looting party.

"'N' I was on me night off," declared Spoodles, triumphantly.

The three who were guilty manifested resentment and some alarm at the joyfulness of these disclaimers, but before they could voice their sentiments the sound of footsteps on the stairs sent them to their work.

TIM MULDOON failed to return from his noon meal hour and at midafternoon Tighson felt safe in reporting his permanent retirement and in notifying the police. Lucy and Bronk canvassed the situation and decided to await more definite signals of danger before committing themselves. Big Pete Benton, strong in his consciousness of innocence, flatly refused, next morning, to assume the fallen mantle of his departed mate. When Tighson suggested harness cleaning he merely observed "Nix!" and retired upstairs. Tighson, following leisurely, found him stretched on the outside of his bunk with his shoes on the counterpane.

The Captain stood at the foot of the bed and studied him. Pete met his eyes for a time, then shifted his attention to the cuticle on the back of his hand and became deeply absorbed in squeezing it into white ridges and watching them flatten out. The Captain remained motionless and silent until his victim looked up at him out of sheer nervousness. Then he spoke silkily:

"I got to go up to my lawyer's and add a chapter to them memoirs I was telling you about. They're right up to date on silver thieves but I feel like I ought to put in something about—a—say strongarm men. A few little notes on life preservers and brass knuckles, now, and the best way of usin' 'em to disable without killin'. And I was thinking perhaps—*after* you clean that harness and collaborate with Mr. *Deloochia*, who is also feeling restful this morning, in shifting hose on the wagon—I was thinking maybe you might be able to give me a few pointers."

Pete's glance had dropped at the mention of life preservers. Now he leaped to his feet, his face convulsed.

"Say, what's your game, anyhow? What d'yeh s'pose I know about life preservers? Yuh must take me f'r a thug."

"That's a wonderful quick mind you got, Pete," said Tighson smoothly. "Now just trot down to that harness and see if your fingers can move as fast as your brains. I'm goin' to feel awful bad if it ain't done when I get back—and that hose shifted."

As soon as he was out of sight of the engine-house he laughed aloud.

"Your trouble ain't intelligence, Bill Tighson; it's pure bull luck. To think of me bingin' the bull's eye thataway with my eyes shut. Now if I could only fathom the black heart of that red-headed Irishman, the job would be 'most done."

But Red Hurley's black heart was beyond fathoming. Tighson sounded and sounded, but the big fellow merely smiled his inscrutable smile and went his isolated way. He did his work—as they all did. Only once, after the second day, was there an audible murmur. Then Pete Benton, after cleaning the harnesses, polishing two sliding-poles and the metal work on the wagon, and scrubbing the whole apparatus-floor on his knees—all this for his sins—objected, late in the afternoon, to extending his charing activities to the flooring of the stalls.

"Pete," said Tighson when the unhappy one voiced his protest, "after you get them stalls scrubbed you can clean the cuspidors—it just occurred to me they ain't been done today."

It was too much. Pete rushed upon the Captain and stood towering over him, his fist aloft. He launched a blow which, had it found its billet, might have driven the Captain through to the basement. But Tighson waved it calmly aside and Pete, lurching forward, found a fist nestling in the peak of his floating ribs and dropped like a log. Tighson stirred him experimentally with his toe but Pete merely groaned.

"Gee, but you're clumsy, Pete," Tighson said reproachfully. "You might 'a' broke my arm, falling against it like that. If he's goin' to be sick now take him outdoors," he added hastily.

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THEIR first fire was in a livery stable at night. A carelessly handled pikepole knocked Tighson—and incidentally Spoodles—into a hatchway through which they were lowering a line. The Captain thoughtfully turned a somersault and landed on his feet. Spoodles, less skilled in the minor details of his calling, fell as Nature dictated and, landing upon his head, died *en route* to the hospital. Tighson suspected Pete Benton, but feared to risk his reputation by the accusation direct. When they returned to the house he observed:

"You fellows had a narrow escape there. For a minute I could just see that lawyer of mine readin' your records."

He did not refer to the incident again.

After that, things hung in a back-water for several days. Tighson realized that he had gone about as far as he could hope to go in the house. What he wanted now was a fire, a good "worker" with plenty of time and plenty of smoke. He had the theory—which facts do not always justify—that the trouble maker has little stomach for punishment and he believed he could reduce his debit balance of undesirables to an appreciable extent.

It was not the season of working fires, but the fates were kind to him. One evening, early in his second week, 13 was detailed to wrestle with the rekindled ruins of a building where other companies had spent an arduous afternoon. It had been a nasty cellar fire and the fight had left the basement almost level full of water and the ground floor pierced with dangerous holes. Tighson took Pete Benton, Lucy and Bronk in with him, leaving the others in the street. Red Hurley was enjoying a day off.

Tighson's task was neither pleasant nor safe. The ruins were treacherous, the smoke thick enough to render progress among the yawning holes perilous, and he had no previous knowledge of the premises to aid him. He quickly realized that for purposes of discipline the occasion was inopportune. His own wits were fully occupied, while his men lacked the distraction of a working stream to keep them out of mischief.

At the end of fifteen minutes he had learned nothing except that the smoke was thickening rapidly. He sent Lucy out to pull a box for help. A moment later, as he knelt beside a jagged hole, striving to pierce the murk of the basement and straining his ears for the whisper of fire, Pete Benton planted a boot on the back of his head and thrust him forward. Tighson pitched headlong into the hole. Grabbing out instinctively to save himself, he caught Bronk's leg and pulled him after. In the passage Bronk struck his head on the ragged edge of the aperture and landed unconscious in the water. Pete hesitated a moment, bending over the dark void; then ran for the front, where he cowered just inside the doorway, afraid to go on or to return.

When the Chief of the District arrived on the alarm, Pete had finally mustered courage enough to emerge. They met on the sidewalk. Pete's eyes were wild and hunted, and his face, through the patches of smoke grime, showed pasty white. Without waiting to be interrogated he rushed upon the Chief and clinging to his superior screeched in his ear:

"They're dead! I seen 'em fall through the hole. I couldn't get 'em out. They're drowned, I tell yeh! They're dead!"

He was talking wildly like a crazy man. The Chief shook him viciously.

"Who? Where are they?" he bawled.

"They're dead, I tell yeh! Hannegan an' Bronk. I seen 'em. They're dead!"

"MEANIN' us, Pete?" inquired a hoarse voice behind him. "You're a liar by the clock."

Pete whirled. His jaw dropped, his eyes went wider yet with terror and his hair fairly bristled as he surveyed the dripping apparition of Tighson supporting the inert Bronk. He turned as if to run, but Tighson laid a heavy hand upon him.

"Here, I got a job for you," he snapped. "Sorry I bothered you, Chief. Just located her. She's under the flooring and in a bunch of floating stuff 'way up front here. I can smear her all right from the rear with three or four men."

He drove Pete, Lucy and one of the nonentities through a narrow alley to the rear hatchway from which he had escaped with Bronkiewitz. They lashed the pipe to a roof ladder, buoyed the hose line with bits of plank and embarked on the surface of the waters. Their frail raft gave them barely a handhold. Between the water and the floor-joists there was barely room for their heads and the atmosphere was all but unbreathable. At intervals of a minute

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or two Tighson reached across the ladder and pushed Pete's head under water.

It took them twenty minutes to cross the cellar, whip the fire and regain the hatchway. Lucy and the nonentity dropped in the mud. Pete, whose physique was stronger, reeled about the yard mumbling drunkenly. Tighson followed him and gripped him by the collar.

"Sa-ay, yuh thought yuh cud kill me, huh? Sa-ay, what d'yuh think, now, huh? D'yuh want another dose? If yuh do, just show up in 13's house again an' yuh'll git it."

"I'll git yuh for this, yuh——"

"Yuh will, will yuh? Sa-ay, Bronk's feelin' fairly good about gettin' outa that hole an' he ain't threatenin' to kiss the man that kicked him in. How about that, huh? An' how about the guy with black hair an' a pimply face that hocked the table ware over in Otis Street? Sa-ay, they're lookin' for him."

Pete didn't come back. No more did Deluccia nor yet the nonentity. All three sent for their belongings in the morning and Tighson received a consignment of probationers to take their places. Red Hurley reported before rollcall. Throughout that ceremony he gazed at Tighson in a wondering, appraising fashion that piqued the Captain. When he went upstairs Hurley followed him to the office.

"Say," he said, "who are you and what's your game, anyhow?"

"You don't know who I am? Is that your trouble?"

Tighson was fencing for time. Hurley worried him. The big fellow had been as quiet as a lamb throughout the week of turmoil; but Tighson could never escape the feeling that he was watching—watching and everlastingly awaiting his opportunity for something. There was a certain quiet dignity in his attitude that puzzled the Captain. Loquacious himself, he attached great significance to silence. The man of few words was pretty certain to inspire him with a kind of awe that was close to fear. He knew from Hannegan that Hurley, when in form, was the most vicious of them all and the failure of the man's bent to manifest itself worried him.

"I know what you *ain't*," Hurley said slowly, after a thoughtful pause. "But what I want to know is what you're plannin' to do. I s'pose I'm next, huh?"

"Well," said Tighson, "if you're so curious as all that just start something."

"All right," said Hurley, and left the room.

"I wonder what *his* specialty is," mused Tighson. "It must be murder."

This high compliment testified to the Captain's exalted opinion of Hurley's personality. He associated murder, above other crimes, with dignity of deportment and strength of character. He was not physically afraid of the man, but he cherished a haunting fear that he had met more than his match in the struggle of wits and moral fortitude.

When he descended, a little later, in response to a vague rumor of trouble, he found that Hurley had taken a stripling probationer off the desk and had set him to work grooming horses while he himself sat on a feed-bin and smoked. Tighson sent the watchman back to his post and curtly ordered Hurley to do his own work. He was frankly disappointed. Even Timmy the Rat, least dignified of misdemeanants, would have evolved some trouble more impressive than browbeating a timid probationer.

"Go to thunder," said Hurley evenly. "Do yeh think y're a better man than I am?"

It was the challenge direct and Tighson could not avoid it. But he faced the test with anything but his usual confidence.

"D'yuh want to try it?" he snapped.

"Any time y' can show me, I'll quit—same as Pete Benton did," Hurley sneered.

Only the changeless Fates know how that battle might have ended had it once been joined, but those Fates had other plans. The tapper sounded. In a moment Tighson, upon the ashpan, and Hurley, upon the tender, were speeding through the streets, their hostilities postponed.

THE call was for the drying-shed of a big lumber yard. As Tighson afterward expressed it, in a moment of poetic ecstasy, "she was breathing warm on the cheek of heaven." In other words it was a good hot blaze when they struck in. Tighson and his crew led a line down a long, narrow alley leading, between towering piles of lumber, straight to the flaming shed which stood in a little clearing. At intervals of thirty feet cross alleys intersected the main avenues, like a checker-

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board of city squares. As they crossed the last of these transverse passages Tighson halted and sniffed about him.

"Kerosene!" he ejaculated. "Bugs workin' in daylight. The place is smeared with it. And chips and shavin's—this is a —— of a place."

He hesitated. He did not relish taking his men down into the pocket ahead with this sort of a plant to lead the fire in behind them. He encountered Hurley's sneering smile, however, and gave a curt order to proceed. When the line had been lighted into working position and opened up he sent the lieutenant back with the rest of the Company, retaining only Hurley, two of the probationers and Bronkiewitz, who, all morning, had been clinging to him like a lost pup befriended.

It was a warm fight and they were soon absorbed in it. They had been there ten minutes perhaps, when a cry from Bronkiewitz gave the alarm.

"Look!"

They swung round instinctively. Through the cross alley a wall of flame was sweeping, feeding upon the oil and shavings and cutting them off completely. Tighson swung the pipe and sent their stream back to cover the hoseline; their only hope, and a frail one. The water might protect the hose for a brief space but it was quickly evident that their single stream was too weak to make any material impression on the body of fire.

"Bronk," snapped Tighson, "shin up the pile and see if we've got a chance on the side."

Bronkiewitz climbed nimbly to the top and was back in a moment.

"All around," he said, with a dry click in his voice. Tighson thought hard for an instant. Then, suddenly, Hurley dropped his hold on the pipe and gripped him by the sleeves, his eyes starting and his voice a bit hysterical.

"What yuh waitin' f'r? Get us outa here."

Tighson smiled wryly.

"Ain't you man enough to get out?" he said.

"You get me outa here," cried Hurley. "Get me outa here, yuh hear?"

"S'posin' I can't?"

"Yuh gotta! Yuh——"

Hurley's voice broke like the voice of a child in trouble. Tighson looked at him queerly, then laughed—a funny, gulping laugh in the smoke.

"Sure I'll get yuh out; keep your shirt on. Here!"

Under his directions they jammed the spike of the pipeholder into a projecting timber close to the ground. Motioning them aside, Tighson knelt on the pipe alone and trained the stream carefully up the alley so that it struck full in the cross wall of fire. He thrust a block beneath the tip and another between it and the wall of lumber to hold it true. Then he partly closed the valve of the pipe to spread the stream and lessen its force.

"Put your coats over your heads and run, now," he directed. "The stream'll cover you through the worst of it if you're lively. Keep your nerve now," he warned the probationers, who were developing symptoms of panic, "and pick up your feet. If you tumble you're goners."

"Well, who's goin' to keep that stream there?" Hurley demanded.

"The best man in the bunch," snapped the Captain. "You? Hey? You, Hurley?"

Without a word Hurley threw his coat over his head and dashed up the alley. The others watched him breathlessly and sobbed aloud when he disappeared beyond the fire and smoke. The probationers went next, one after the other. Bronkiewitz hung back, his contorted face turned toward Tighson. He tried to speak and failed.

"What's the matter, Bronk? Want to stay?"

The Captain's tone was sharp and he moved as if to relinquish his post. The struggle of the man's soul was reflected in his agonized face. It was brief.

"My ——, no!" he screeched, and ran for his life.

TIGHSON smiled as he gingerly released his hold on the pipe. It retained its position, held by its spike and the blocks and the kick of the stream. With a swift glance he noted the lay of the ground ahead; then swung his slicker over his head, drew a deep breath and darted up the path, sheltered by the cold flow of the stream. Beyond the wall of fire he came upon the four, staring back with the faces of men who wait upon tragedy. His unexpected appearance completed their demoralization; they could

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only gaze at him and gibber. Tighson laughed derisively in Hurley's blank face.

"Ain't you the blue-ribbon bonehead, hey?" he panted. "Now ketch hold of that line and see if you can snake her out without burning her up. That hose costs a dollar a foot, you know; say nothing of the pipe."

They grasped the line and lumbered away with it as rapidly as they could drag the heavy thing.

"Whoa!" Tighson yelled when the pipe came thrashing out of the smother. "Jump on it, now!"

When they had subdued it and set the stream at work again Tighson turned to Bronkiewitz and said, more kindly than any man in that company had ever heard him speak:

"Bronk, I know you wanted to do it and it ain't your fault if God wouldn't let you. Maybe I wouldn't 'a' been so chipper myself if I'd thought I'd really got to stay. And you, Red Hurley! Sa-ay, Red, what d'yuh think I had you sized up for, a while ago? Sa-ay, honest, Red, I'm ashamed to tell."

And he elucidated no further.

At rollcall next morning an unassuming individual appeared and surreptitiously showed Tighson a police badge.

"Got a guy out here I want to have look over this bunch," he said.

In response to his call, a meager cripple, a beggar by his garb, hobbled in, escorted by two other plain-clothes men. He took one glance at the line.

"That's him; the redheaded one."

"I thought so," remarked the detective. "Here, I got a warrant for you, Mr. Redhead. Comin' easy or want the bracelets?"

And Red Hurley departed, unresisting and unshackled. The Captain's voice floated after him:

"Beggars' pennies! So that's your lay. And just to think, Red, I thought it was murder!"

A little later, in the quiet of his office, he leaned back in the swivel chair and heaved a heartfelt sigh, like a man at rest after toil. By late afternoon he was yawning cavernously. Next day, from morning to night, he nosed restlessly over the house, hunting trouble as a terrier hunts rats. But he found none. Bronkiewitz was his adoring slave; the surviving nonentity was meekly but ostentatiously industrious and law-abiding; the two engineers were as they always had been and the new men were firemen all. Even the haggard lieutenant had acquired a smile and a spring in his step. Bill Tighson experienced a sensation of awful emptiness.

IN THE morning he met John Hannegan at breakfast, as appointed. Hannegan surveyed, not without a certain grim pleasure, the outward signs of combat upon his friend. Strips of surgeon's plaster upon cheek and forehead told of the fight to save Bronkiewitz; a larger portion in a shaved area above his right ear indicated the target of Pete Benton's pikepole; a bandaged hand evidenced the potency of the lumber-yard fire. Hannegan smiled covertly.

"I'm glad you're back, John," said Tighson with deep feeling.

"Been having a hard time, eh?"

"Yes," Tighson said thoughtfully. "A couple more days like yesterday'd about finish me, I guess. When a man gets along our age, Jack, it don't do for him to let up; he dies pretty fast if he does."

He paused and his face lighted up.

"Sa-ay, I bet that luff of mine is fit to be tied by now. Them boys'll be possessed after two weeks of it. I'm goin' to beat it back to the old boat. S' long; here's my report."

He tossed a folded paper on the table and departed. John Hannegan opened the paper and read:

VITAL STATISTICS—ENGINE CO. 13

One Trouble Company...	12 Men	Dead.....	1 Man
		In jail.....	2 Men
		Missing but accounted for....	3 "
		Seen a great light	2 "
		Engineers.....	2 "
		Lieutenant.....	1 Man
		Captain.....	1 "
Total	12 Men	Total	12 Men

Recapitulation:

Survivors.....	6 Men
Able Firemen (detailed)	2 "
Greenhorns.....	3 "
	11 Men
Due you.....	1—*vice* Red Hurley
Total	12 Men

Respectfully submitted and guaranteed kind and house-broken under the Food and Drug Act.

WILBERT TIGHSON.

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A TRIUMPH OF MEDIEVALISM

by GEORGE SHEPHERD

THERE was a tilt to her chin that showed she had a will to be reckoned with; but MacIntyre, with the denseness of the young male who has already determined what ought to be, quite overlooked it. He was not, however, oblivious to many other things. Her slender, active grace, her fine-spun golden hair, her wonderful china-blue eyes, and the indescribable little dimples that would come and go so unexpectedly—of all these he was fully aware.

Also he realized that she could be—and generally was — tantalizing, bewitching, maddening and then, just as he arrived at complete distraction, soothing and sympathetic. To tell the truth, she was spoiled. Twenty-four years of being petted and pampered, for three of which she had been entirely her own mistress had overlaid the real Beatrice with a little crust, often invisible, of pettiness and unthinking selfishness.

"Don, old boy," she was saying, serious for once, "I can't. Honestly I can't, and you oughtn't to bother me so."

The young man, who saw no good reasons why she couldn't, stretched his long legs out in front of him and scratched patterns on the floor with the rowels of his spurs.

"Why, Beatrice?" he asked presently. "Don't you like it here?"

"I adore it," she answered. "It's wonderful." She got up, walked to the edge of the vine-sheltered veranda and looked out.

In front of her the vast sweep of rich, open pasture land stretched away in long, easy undulations and, at first sloping gently up, gradually rose higher and higher, until in the haze-softened distance it blended into the gigantic dome of the great mountain which towered up to the brilliant tropic sky.

To one side lay the group of comfortable ranch buildings, and to the other, across more folds and billows of prairie, could be seen the Pacific Ocean, white-flecked and sparkling in the sun. And enfolding all, giving life and vigor and snap to every living being, even to the trees and plants and the very soil from which they grew, was the sharp, thin air of the mountains.

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"And to think," said the girl, "that you own it for miles and miles—that you are a regular feudal baron, with the most beautiful barony in the world! Why should you want a wife too?"

"I'd swap it all for you so quick it would make your head swim!" he burst out with such vehemence that she was almost shaken out of her poise.

But she recovered herself quickly.

"Donald MacIntyre," she said, "sit down and we'll talk seriously. Now," she went on, "I like you. I like everything about you, from the way you sit a horse and the way you talk to your men to the kind of neckties you wear. I think this is a glorious place, and I would love to live here; *but*—it's an awfully big but—I'm afraid to marry any man, and most of all you. Because it just isn't in me to be bossed or to belong to any one. I couldn't stand it. And you couldn't stand it if I wasn't yours absolutely; and then we'd both be miserable. So there you are."

MacIntyre scratched the floor with utter recklessness.

"Look here, Beatrice!" he blurted out. "Don't you love me?"

"I don't know," she answered. "Anyhow, not enough to let you own me—which is the only way you will have me. I tell you, I can never belong to any one but myself," she finished almost passionately.

MacIntyre had no answer, and in a minute the girl spoke again.

"Don, do let's be just ordinary friends some more. For if we can't, I'll have to go to the trouble of persuading Aunt Olivia that she doesn't like it here and wants to go back to Honolulu. . . . What—what's that?"

Floating through the thin air came a low rumbling sound, like thunder, and yet plainly not thunder; like the growl of some tremendous, angry beast, yet more ominous and powerful.

MacIntyre looked up at the mountain.

"Mauna Loa," he said.

"What does it mean?"

"Oh, nothing. She has a pain in her insides and is making a fuss about it. She does every once in a while."

"And what happens?" she asked.

"It generally stops after a bit. Or perhaps the side of the mountain splits open somewhere and a lot of lava flows out. It never does any harm, though, except to spoil the ground it goes on. You see, it never shoots up or explodes—just flows gently down the hillside. Still, even that is very rare. It's nothing to worry over."

But the girl shuddered.

"That's what they said at Pompeii," she answered.

"Whatever they said at Pompeii," he replied, getting up, "here are our horses. A good gallop, and the throes of this island in the making won't worry you so much."

They went down the steps to where a man held two saddle horses; a slight-built, yellow-skinned young fellow he was, with high, prominent cheek bones and small black eyes. He led forward Donald's big mare and held her by the bit for his master to mount.

"No, the lady first," said MacIntyre, himself holding the other horse while Beatrice sprang into the saddle. As they rode off he apologized for the man. "Ivanoff's intentions are better than his manners," he said. "He is still pretty primitive."

"But what a strange-looking man he is!" she replied. "Is he Russian?"

"Supposedly," he answered. "But he tells me his father came as a child from somewhere outside of Russia. At any rate he is a remarkable fellow, for he is the most wonderful horseman I've ever seen, and six months ago he had never been on a horse. I think it's because he loves them so."

"And I should say," said the girl, "that it isn't only horses he loves. I saw the way he looked at you."

"If only his complaint were catching, then, it——"

"Please don't," she put in quickly.

They rode for two hours, straight toward the ever rumbling mountain, now galloping, now trotting, or again breathing the horses with a leisurely walk. And in these intervals MacIntyre always renewed his pleading, though he hindered, rather than helped, his cause thereby. I have already said that Miss Fairchild was spoiled; need I add that she was obstinate?

"Can't I make you see," she protested finally, "that no matter how much I care for you—and I do a lot—that I'm so constituted that I've *got* to be my own mistress and live my own life? It isn't in me to belong to any man."

"And can't I make you see," he replied, "that it's only right and natural for every

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woman to belong to some man, and you ought to belong to me?"

"Old-fashioned piffle," she laughed. "We're in the twentieth century now, not the sixteenth. Women are entitled to their own lives nowadays."

As they came back to the ranch house they passed close to a field where Ivanoff of the primitive manners was teaching a big black pony to follow a polo ball.

"What a wonderful horse!" exclaimed Beatrice with the enthusiasm of one who knew.

"Gunpowder, there?" said MacIntyre. "Yes I think he's the best horse on the ranch, or anywhere else for that matter. And I believe Ivanoff prays for him—or to him, I'm not sure which. In fact he respects me, I fancy, because I own Gunpowder. And he's taught the horse to climb a tree if he gives the word."

ALL that night the mountain growled and complained. Deep, booming reverberations would rise and fall, sometimes dying down to a low, threatening purr, only to regain volume and burst forth into muffled thundering, as if some stupendous battle were being fought in the bowels of the earth.

Not until dawn did it cease, nor until then did Beatrice close her eyes. Steady as were her nerves and perfect her self-control, she could not quite compose herself to sleep. There was nothing to be afraid of, she told herself; but yet in the presence of the tremendous, unknown convulsion of Nature that was harshly echoing through the still night air she had a feeling of impotence and defenselessness, and, though she did not realize it, of loneliness.

But in the morning when, dressed in fresh, cool linen, she joined MacIntyre and his mother and her own aunt at breakfast, she was as clear-eyed and smiling as if she never had a care in the world. She had passed a splendid night, she said; and when Donald looked at her in wonder, her eyes met his challengingly.

"I may be fibbing," they said, "but it is my right."

"Well," he said, giving her the reassurance of which she denied the need, "we won't have to listen to old Mauna Loa any more. The lava broke out above North Gulch early this morning, and that'll quiet her for a while."

After breakfast Beatrice and MacIntyre rode out to see the lava flow, taking Ivanoff along to hold the horses in case they should want to dismount.

As they rode along, Beatrice, who did not seem to feel like talking, kept glancing back at the slender, stolid-faced Russian.

"From watching that man look at you, Donald," she said finally, "I can understand how domestic slavery survived so many centuries. I wish I could get even a dog to look at me that way."

"I'm not a dog," he replied fervently, "but just the same——"

"Now hush!" she broke in. "Tell me, what did you ever do for him, that he's so devoted to you?"

"Oh, not so much," he laughed. "He's the primitive sort that has to be devoted to some one. It's almost a nuisance, though," he went on. "I took him with me once on a trip around the island, and he played the dickens with the domestic arrangements of every house I stopped at by trying to sleep in front of my bedroom door. But I'm fond of him too. We're quite a medieval pair, though I believe you already said that about me."

She frowned a little.

"Yes," she said. "All men are, really. That's why no one of them will get me."

"Look!" he said quickly.

They had swung around a fold in the ground, and now to one side of them could be seen a long fissure in the earth, from which was slowly oozing a wide, shallow stream of molten lava. With a prodigious seething and bubbling and half shrouded in steam and sulfurous smoke, the liquid fire welled out from some vast subterranean melting-pot, and then slowly flowed down the gently sloping hillside. As it slid along it wrinkled and stuck and piled up here and there in little humps and then went on, precisely as hot molasses candy will do if you pour it on a sloping surface.

After one long intake of her breath Beatrice made no exclamation of surprise or wonder; for which MacIntyre silently thanked her. Why use words in the presence of a manifestation which in other days would have been called a miracle?

For minutes they watched it in silence.

"And is there no danger?" she asked at last.

"Not the slightest," he answered. "You don't have to walk into it, you know. And

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it goes so slowly that one can always get out of the way. Also, by good luck, it isn't even going to spoil much good land. You see where it's going to." He pointed to a deep cañon that lay obliquely across the course of the lava.

From where they stood, on the right edge of the flow, they could see that on the other side the fiery river had already reached the bank and the lava was slipping over it. With that point as the angle, the front of the slowly advancing stream and the edge of the gulch made a big V, opposite the opening of which they were standing.

"Let's get off and go up close," suggested Beatrice.

After they had watched the sheet of molten slag for a while from a point so close they almost scorched the toes of their boots, MacIntyre saw Ivanoff unsuccessfully struggling to pick a stone out of his horse's hoof and went back to help. The stone was tightly wedged in and it was a matter of some minutes to pry it loose. When he looked up again, Beatrice had walked down into the point of the V and was watching the lava slide off the edge of the precipitous cliff and drop sizzling down to the bottom of the cañon, five hundred feet below. He shouted to her, and she looked up and waved her hand.

"Come back!" he cried.

Evidently she did not understand, for she only waved again. He started to run toward her.

"Come back! Quick!" he called when he was near enough for his voice to carry.

"But look how slowly it comes," she answered. "It can't possibly catch me." And she started toward him in a leisurely fashion.

"I know," he called, still running toward her, "but——"

Then it happened! The front of the slowly advancing sheet of fire came to a little depression in the ground near its center and a rivulet of lava broke out and rushed into it with suddenly accelerated speed. The depression was the head of a swale that ran to the cañon's edge with a steeper pitch than the ground on each side, and so the little stream raced madly down it, and in a few seconds reached the bank and commenced to pour over. It ran between Beatrice and MacIntyre. Back of Beatrice was a river of fire a hundred yards wide, to one side of her a sheer precipice, and to the other a sea of fire that inch by inch drew closer to the precipice.

She was caught in a slowly closing trap of fire. For an instant they both stood still. Then MacIntyre turned and rushed for his mare. He jumped on her and, driving in his spurs, charged at the stream of lava which separated them. Fifty feet short of it the the mare dug her front hoofs into the ground and checked herself so suddenly that MacIntyre went flying over her head.

He scrambled to his feet and ran back for Beatrice's horse, thinking perhaps it would make the jump. Ivanoff's, he knew, was a worthless plug that would never attempt it. But Ivanoff had turned the other animal loose to graze, and now, terrified no doubt at the spectacle of what had been demanded of MacIntyre's mare, it refused to be caught.

"Get after him, Ivanoff!" ordered MacIntyre; and the Russian leaped on his own mount and gave chase. MacIntyre caught his mare and was going to help him until he found that the beast had strained a tendon and could hardly be spurred into a trot. Then he went back to the edge of the lava and spoke across it to Beatrice.

"Ivanoff will have your horse in a minute, and we'll get you out all right," he said, keeping his voice as calm as he could. "Keep your nerve, Beatrice."

BUT the last words he might as well have left unsaid. All the girl's surface pettiness and pettishness, all her little shows of temper and selfishness, had fallen away and in the face of that oncoming sheet of flame she was the real Beatrice, brave, considerate and thoroughbred from the feather that stuck rakishly up from her hat to the toes of her well made riding-boots.

"That's all right, Don," she said in the same voice she would have used to express preference for oranges rather than grapefruit. "I don't believe it will work, though. A horse doesn't like to jump water, and you don't suppose there is any chance of its going over fire. What?"

MacIntyre tried to keep his face from showing he knew she was right as he answered—

"We'll manage, Beatrice."

"I'm not worrying, Don," she said.

Five minutes passed and Ivanoff did not come back. Both of them knew that it might be impossible for him to catch the

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horse, and they knew, too, that it would be of little use if he did. The little stream of lava between them sizzled and sputtered and threw up tiny spurts of flame as it rolled on. The wide stream behind the girl kept slowly eating its way toward her, and the front of the sheet which joined the two gradually crept nearer the cliff edge.

"What about the bank, Don?" she asked. "Any chance of getting down it?"

He groaned as he answered:

"None in the world. It's five hundred feet, as straight and sheer as if it had been cut out with a knife."

Another five minutes and he said—

"Beatrice, I'm going to take a shot at jumping it myself."

"You're going to do nothing of the kind," she answered quickly. "What's the farthest you ever jumped when you went in for athletics?"

"Nineteen feet eleven."

"And that's thirty, as I guess. Besides, what good will it do to have you over here?"

His self-restraint broke for a moment.

"Merciful God!" he said. "Do you think I can leave you there *alone?*"

"Don't be foolish and medieval," she answered gently. "Besides, you can't do it. Measure it with the rope from your saddle."

He took the rope and, measuring by the spread of his arms, tied a knot every six feet. Then he flung one end across to her and in the instant before it fell flaming into the lava, he could see that the stream was just short of twenty-two feet wide.

For a while longer they were silent, watching the slow advance of the glowing flood that made ever smaller the island of turf on which she stood.

"It's a great bore it has to be so slow," she said finally.

"Beatrice," he answered, "there must be some way. With men and ropes I may be able to work up from the bottom of the cañon if——"

"If there's time, you mean. How long will it take you to get down there from here?"

"I can do it in an hour and a half. Listen. Measure off one step from the front edge of the flow and I'll take the time in which it is covered. Then pace off the distance to the bank and we'll see how much time is left."

They did, and found that in fifty-five minutes the whole of the semicircular space where she was would be covered with lava.

"You'd better stay here, Don," she said, when they had checked over their reckoning. "It diverts my mind a bit to have you, and makes it easier." On the last words her voice caught a little.

"Beatrice," he cried out, "I love you better than anything in heaven or earth, and I want to be with you for one minute if it's the last I have. I'm coming over there."

"Don't!" she screamed. "It will do no good. And why should you die too when you know that—I don't love you."

Then she quickly turned her back—perhaps to see how far the lava had come on the other side; and a wisp of smoke drifting in her face made her wipe her eyes for a second.

"Don, old boy," she said, turning back, "I've been a pig to you. Will you please forgive me?"

Don choked.

"And Don," she went on, "when it comes—I'm going by way of the cliff. Will you promise not to look then? I won't be pretty, Don."

"You won't be alone," he said fiercely.

"If you don't give me your promise not to do that, I'll go this instant," she replied. "Will you promise?"

He did not answer, and she walked to the edge of the cliff.

"Yes," he said, "I promise."

She came back.

"That's a good boy." As her eyes gazed idly over the plain that lay behind MacIntyre and which she could not reach, a little flicker of hope came into them, but quickly died away.

"It's Ivanoff coming back," she said. "He hasn't caught the horse. But it wouldn't have done any good anyhow, so what's the difference—except that having him here will make me behave like a real lady right up to the end. One always keeps up before servants, you know." She finished with a little laugh that was meant to be light, but came more nearly being hysterical.

MacIntyre turned around and saw a horseman coming swiftly over the plain.

"He's getting a lot of speed out of the old nag," was his first thought, and then he saw that the horse was black instead of the bay the man had been riding. In a few seconds more he recognized the beautiful lines and the long, powerful stride of Gunpowder. Ivanoff came on, the horse seeming almost

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to fly underneath him. As he drew near MacIntyre he pulled up and then dismounted.

"Gunpowder," he said, his eyes flashing with pride and his tone implying that no other words were necessary. Then he added, "He jump."

MacIntyre pounded him on the back and shouted:

"By ——! I believe he will! Here, let me try, quick!"

But Ivanoff stopped him as he was about to mount.

"No," he said. "You heavy, I light," and looked from his own slender frame to his master's stalwart six feet. Then, while MacIntyre hesitated, he added, "And Gunpowder, he know *me*."

It was a hard struggle for MacIntyre; his heart against his mind, his fervent longing to save her himself against what he knew was her best chance. But finally he said:

"Yes, you're right, Ivanoff. He'll do anything for you, and perhaps he won't for me. Go ahead." And greatly to the man's embarrassment he shook Ivanoff by the hand.

IVANOFF first led the horse close to the edge of the lava, that he might see what it was he had to jump and how necessary it was that he clear it cleanly. Gunpowder sniffed and pawed and expressed disgust, but no fear.

Why should he? Had not this man ridden him every day for six months and never yet hurt a hair on his body? To be sure, he had made him do some very strange things, going up and down stairs and such foolishness, but never anything that had any harm in it if only it were done by a sensible horse and a knowing rider. Then Ivanoff adjusted the girth, patted the horse on the neck and mounted.

First walking him back a hundred yards, he turned and started toward the stream at an easy canter that quickly lengthened out until the horse was rushing forward with the speed and power of a whirlwind.

Six feet from the edge of the lava there came the slightest touch on Gunpowder's mouth, the least lifting of the knees which pressed his flanks, and his feet left the ground in a perfect take-off. A yard the other side of the deadly stream they came down cleanly, and his rider gently checked his pace, brought him back to where the girl stood as if fastened to the ground, and slid off his back.

"One minute. He make breath," said Ivanoff to Beatrice as he shortened the stirrups. "Then he go. Pouf! All right."

"Will he make it carrying double?" the girl called across to MacIntyre.

"No," he answered soberly. "You'll have to try it alone."

"But," she said hesitatingly. "But——"

Then for the first time she realized the sacrifice which was to be made for her. "Ivanoff!" she wailed. "I can't leave him here."

Ivanoff, understanding what she said, laughed, shrugged his shoulders, and said, "All right." While MacIntyre did what he would have called on Ivanoff to do for him had he been in the place the Russian now was—he lied. "The horse will jump back for him," he said. "It knows him, you see."

"Are you sure?" she insisted.

"Yes."

With a white face and steady hands she got on the horse and settled herself in the saddle.

"Take as long a lead as you can," cautioned MacIntyre. "Keep your feet loose in the stirrups, and if he doesn't land clean, let yourself come free over his head. But he'll do it all right, now he's been over once."

She took her lead and got up speed gradually as Ivanoff had done; she picked him up perhaps not quite so skilfully (but Gunpowder knew how to do things for himself), and once more the horse sailed cleanly over the sizzling, sputtering stream of red-hot lava.

MacIntyre helped her dismount. He took her by both hands and for an instant steadied her against his shoulder. But, because he was a gentleman and she had just come back from half an hour spent gazing squarely into the eyes of death, and because, too, the man who had saved her was now in the same peril as that from which she had escaped, he did no more.

Then came the most wonderful thing of all. When MacIntyre had said the horse would jump back by himself, he thought he was lying—though Ivanoff perhaps had another opinion, for he loved Gunpowder, and in his stupid way he thought that the horse loved him. And Ivanoff was right. MacIntyre led the horse back a little

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distance from the lava stream, crossed the stirrups on the saddle, caught up the bridle reins, and then ran forward with him.

As he came near, Gunpowder saw Ivanoff standing on the other side holding out his cap and shaking it in a way that could mean nothing but a succulent mouthful of oats. He gave a whinny, broke into a gallop and took the jump with the same glee as that with which a colt breaks over from one field to the next. He found the oats, which Ivanoff had stowed in his pockets, enjoyed them to his heart's content, and then with a fourth clean jump brought Ivanoff back to safety.

LATER in the morning, after she had rested a little, Beatrice sent for Ivanoff to come to her room. First she thanked him; but because the tone of her voice and the look in her eyes held the most of her meaning, I shall not repeat her words. Then she held out a little roll of gold coin and a jewel.

"These," she said, "you are to spend on whatever you like. And this is to keep to remember that the gratitude of one whose life you have saved always endures and that you may always call on her."

Ivanoff was a very dull-witted, stupid fellow. Of the value of gold he had a very dim conception, of jewels none at all. Then, too, he had just received from his master a gift that outweighed a rajah's treasure chest. He had been told that as long as he, Ivanoff, lived no other man should ever throw a leg over Gunpowder. Moreover, he had a certain primitive fidelity that made him reluctant to receive gifts from any one but his master.

He shook his head.

"No," he said.

Beatrice was astonished. She insisted.

"No," Ivanoff repeated stupidly. "No."

"You are a very brave man," she said. "And very foolish. And very noble."

She paused.

"Tell me," she went on, "why did you risk your life for me, a stranger to you, and with no thought of reward?" She was curious to hear how nearly he would be able to voice the altruistic heroism which alone could have actuated him. The answer she got was—

"Because you are the master's woman."

She recoiled.

"Do you mean," she said very slowly, "that it was not at all for me—that my life had nothing to do with it—that it was only because you think I belong to your master?"

"Why, yes. Of course," he answered.

SHE found MacIntyre on the veranda.

"Donald," she said, "I've just found out that as a mere woman I'm not considered to amount to much—that my life was saved today only because it was supposed to belong to you. Now, Donald, I'm still young and fairly happy and want to keep on living; and—and—and can you suggest any way to make it more certain that I shall?"

He could and did.

After a while, when several things had been said and done to their great mutual satisfaction, MacIntyre, with a great show of being perturbed, said—

"Beatrice, I hate to think that it has only happened because that medieval servant of mine went and frightened you into it."

"And you," she replied quickly, "are just as medieval as your servant. You're not even modern enough to let a poor girl hide behind a good excuse."

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THE BEST POLICY

by FRANK HOUGHTON

GENERALLY speakin', folks say that honesty is the best policy. I can't say how it is in the East, 'cause I ain't never b'en thar, leastways never since I was a kid. But in Alberty thar ain't no doubt about it at all. Honesty is the best policy, every time.

Because why? Because in the West they ain't used to it. You see, in the West folks is either horsemen, cattlemen or in the real estate business. Thar ain't a pin to choose between 'em. The general notion is, d'ye see, that to be a real live, successful, up-to-date horse dealer y'u got to be a pleasant-spoken, pop'lar sort o' party an' y'u got to be a nat'ral born liar. Leastways that's the idea of horse-dealin' in the West, or was till quite recent.

A horse dealer, most any man'll tell you West o' the Big Lakes, is born, not made. I knoo a horse dealer once—— But no, maybe I'd best not tell y'u that story.

But talkin' o' business in the West, thar's the pop'lar notion o' cattle-dealin', that it's the same as horse-dealin', but the idea is a man's got to be a thief as well. But that ain't my notion at all. Y'u see, I'm in both of 'em. I've b'en truckin' an' tradin' in both cattle an' horses, an' punchin' cows for near thirty years in the West, an' I maintain that thar ain't nothin' like honesty, leastways in them businesses, it's so ter'ble confusin' an' misleadin.'

Now a liar's all right. Thar ain't nothin' puzzlin' about him at all. Y'u know where y'are. But a honest man, he's got y'u tangled right from the turn loose.

Why, boys, I knoo a honest man once, an' afore he'd b'en in town six months thar wasn't a man in it would take a drink with him, let alone trust him. An' to make matters wus, he begun goin' to church.

No siree! take my word for it, in the West thar ain't nothin' like honesty for a gent, either in horse-dealin', cattle-dealin' or the real estate business, providin', o' course, he don't carry it too far. An' the man as started that same gag about honesty bein' the best policy weren't no fool, an' now I'm tellin' y'u.

But just hold on. As a ins'ance of how ter'ble misleadin' honesty is let me tell y'u a little story. Y'u see, I'm a horse dealer, as I said previous, an' though I ain't never made many millions, still I done nicely, an' for why? Because I was honest. Just as honest as the day, though I say it meself.

But I didn't carry it too far. Y'u see, in honesty, same as 'most everything, y'u got to use jedgment an' common sense.

I beg y'ur pardon! Did I never go to church, was y'u sayin'? O' course I went to church, purty reg'lar, too, once or twice every year, at night, down a little back alley, when thar wasn't nothin' doin'.

I tell y'u right now I ain't one o' them kind that holds with fussin', an' showin' off, an' makin' no big splurge. I'm a re-ligious

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man, if I am a horse an' cattleman, an' try to do my dooty to my neighbor without lettin' him do me—if I ken, mind y'u.

Y'u see, it's like this: As the Scriptures say, y'u shouldn't be lettin' y'ur right hand know what y'ur left hand's b'en up to. If that's the case, don't it seem plumb childish to let y'ur neighbors know? I may be wrong, o' course, but that's how I got it figured out.

Y'u see, I'm gettin' on a bit—maybe that accounts for my re-ligious practises—seventy-two my last birthday, or maybe it was seventy-four, I ain't never rightly sure o' it. The years go so outrageous fast now. Why, it don't seem ten days ago since it was Spring an' the gophers just out, an' the buffalo birds back, an' the curlews a hollerin', an' the crocuses all in bloom, an' the yellow buffalo-beans.

I mind how the darlin' kiddies used to pick 'em down by the two mile coolie. Them's my two little girls, y'u know. It don't seem no time since they used to call me, "Daddy," an' climb on my knees an' want me to tell them a story.

That was forty years ago an' the darlin's is dead now, an' thar old daddy's the same as ever still—a little stiffer maybe an' sore in the side occasional where the big blue roan went back on him, an' maybe a little whiter an' wrinkleder about the face—a swappin' horses same as he used to, an' truckin' an' tradin' round, an' tellin' funny stories an' laughin' at funny jokes, the same as he used to, an' folks sayin', "he's such a happy old party, always a smilin'." Life do be kind o' funny after all, people is sich fools.

An' on'y to think o' it! Why, the Summer's past an' it's near the middle o' September now. I always kind o' notice September; my birthday's in September y'u know. But it don't trouble me none now, since the kiddies ain't here. I was just kind o' mentionin' it, 'cause the Fall's come an' Winter'll be with us in a minute. Gee whiz! But the years do sure race somethin' outrageous.

But I'm wanderin' ter'ble from my story, an' I can see you folks is kind o' rushed, but a party just nat'rally drifts into that way, settin' round with the boys an' talkin' horse, an' lookin' out across the sunny prairie where we used to ride in the old days. But it's all changed now, an' fenced, an' folks play a ter'ble childish game called golf.

Golf! Jumpin' Maniacs! But it's very pop'lar with bank managers, old ladies an' cripples.

An' ride in them stinkin' autymobiles instead o' horseback like men. But just half a minute now, till I give y'u that little ins'ance o' real confusin', honest horse-dealin' to prove what I was sayin', that "Honesty is the best policy."

I mind it was a consid'ble number o' years ago an' I was a bit younger an' soopler. An' the kiddies was alive, too—the dear kiddies! I mind we was ranchin' in them days. Most o' the ranchmen was young Englishmen, a real nice outfit, happy an' careless as can be, playin' polo, the purtiest game I ever seen, swappin' horses, punchin' cows, visitin' thar friends, an' goin' broke, free an' easy, an' pleasant. I rec'lect I used to make a dollah or two, occasional, out o' them same young Englishmen, pickin' up gentle, handy cow ponies an' turnin' them over to them for a hundred or a hundred an' fifty.

Some o' the town men, too, used to play polo a bit. Thar was one in partickilar; he was well fixed, too, but very careful. Some folks even went so far as to say he was mean. But I ain't sayin' that, mind. I ain't callin' no one no names. I'm on'y sayin' he was a careful man an' didn't throw his money 'round like some folks, which is only right an' proper.

Maybe y'u'd kind o' size him up better if I was to say he was always layin' up agen' a rainy day. Y'u see, in Alberty, same as in most other countries, thar's rainy spells an' dry spells, wet years an' dry years. An' sometimes thar's frost, too, in Summer, an' hailstorms; an' the wind blows, too, occasional. That's why it's so healthy on them "flower-bedecked plains," as the advertisements describes 'em.

I'm told, too, that the wind kind o' shifts the microbes. I can understand that, 'cause I've often wondered how things what ain't anchored resists it at all. Thar was Dave Macdougal's cow, for ins'ance. But that's another story, an' this ain't no weather bureau. To resoome:

NOW thar was one thing I must say about that same careful young man that I didn't altogether like, bein' a honest horse dealer. He was always tryin' to pick up a polo pony for about half price; carefulness in that way kind o' hurt me, as y'u may understand.

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Well, I mind, in the pursoot o' my business, I picked up a bunch o' five or maybe six ponies from a stranger who drove 'em in from Montana. I rec'lect thar was one in partic'lar, a roan pony mar'—a fine_upstandin' honest-lookin' black, about fourteen three. Up to weight, too, an' guaranteed plumb gentle an' handy.

Well, boys, I don't mind sayin' I was all took with the little mar.' She was ter'ble nice in the stable, too. Y'u could do 'most anything with her; friendly as a dawg. She carried herself awful proud an' sassy, a archin' her neck; good kind eyes, too, an' as purty as a schoolma'am. Thinks I to myself, if she's near as good as she looks an' handy as the man says, an' can gallop a bit, she'll suit one o' them polo boys an' I'll get one hundred an' fifty plunks for her, easy as kiss me hand.

Well, I got Billy to help me, right away, an' we roached her mane an' banged her tail an' fixed her up in the redic'lous fashion them Englishmen always fixes up thar ponies, an' she looked fine, now I'm tellin' y'u. O' course no self-respectin' cowman would ride such redic'lous-lookin' objec's as Englishmen likes, but this here's a free country, as well as a land o' plenty, an' every man to his taste. Maybe I forgot to mention it, but I give just thirty dollars a head for them ponies.

Well, as soon's I got her slicked up—the roan mar' I mean—I throwed my saddle on an' rode out o' town. I found her paces all right, an' she was sure handy. I never seen a pony rein nicer. She wasn't scared o' nothin', neither. When I got her out o' town, I whirled her about some an' she was sure great. I tell y'u right now, boys, I was just tickled to death with the little mar,' an' begun figurin' on one hundred an' seventy-five for her.

Then I galloped her, an' then, boys, oh, boys! That's whar she wasn't one, two, three. Gallop? Lovely Susan! She couldn't make a fat man sweat. I de-clare I could've run beside her meself, nice an handy, an' I ain't fleet. Boys, it sure was a disappointment.

Y'u see, bein' honest, I couldn't offer her to one o' the Englishmen who was all my friends. The only way I could see o' disposin' of her was as a saddle pony for a little girl, an' I couldn't hope for no price that way. O' course she'd suit a bank manager. She was just made for sich folks, but a deal o' that kind's ter'ble chancy.

When I got her back to the stable I pulled the saddle off an' was givin' her a little rubdown, when in comes the careful man with one o' the Miss Joneses, them same ladies bein' ter'ble high-toned. O' course Jones weren't thar name, but y'u understand I ain't mentionin' no names, as I said previous. It don't do to mention no names in a small town.

Well, they comes a saunterin' up the stable, the careful man with his hat kind o' cocked, a smokin' a big ci-gar, an' lookin' like a millionaire.

"Mornin,' John," says he to me, a puffin' at his ci-gar an' studyin' the roan out o' the corner o' his eyes.

"How do do, Mr. Brown," says I.

Y'u see Mr. Brown weren't his name, but it'll do just as well as any other name, as this is only a in'sance to show y'u what a fine thing real honesty is even in horse-dealin', an' I ain't mentionin' no names.

He didn't say nothin' for a spell; just stood thar kind o' watchin' me an' the mar' an' smokin' his big ci-gar. Then he says somethin' to Miss Jones which I didn't ketch, an' she says, "Just too lovely, Algernon," an' heaves a kind o' sigh, while I kep' right on kind o' murmurin' to the mar' the way 'most all horses like, never lettin' on, y'u know.

"Weather's keepin' fine, John," says he.

"S-s-s-ssss," says I, still a-rubbin', an' never lettin' on I even heerd him.

"Nice warm day," says he, an' he took his ci-gar out o' his mouth an' flicked the ash off.

"Ye-e-es," says I again very slow, as if I was that interested in the little mar' I couldn't pay attention to nothin'. I riz up as I spoke an' steppin' back a bit put my head to wan side an' begun a lookin' at her very critical.

"Not too bad a lookin' cayuse, John," says Mr. Brown, an' he shifted his ci-gar to the other side of his mouth an' looked at Miss Jones.

"Perfect love," says she.

"Ye-es," says I again, very slow.

"I don't seem to rec'lect the brand, John," says he.

He didn't want to pertend to no ignorance before the lady. It was a Montana brand, a lazy R on the nigh flank.

"No," says I, an' I just kep' studyin' the pony.

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THEN the two o' them walked away up the stable to where my big bay single driver was standin'. They both looked at it for a spell an' talked consid'ble. Then they come back; an', says he, a lookin' at the mar' again—

"She should pack quite a weight, John," says he, takin' his ci-gar out o' his mouth an' holdin' it. He was one o' them ter'ble knowin' lads that thought he knoo all about a horse. I do like to meet 'em occasional.

"Mr. Brown," says I, an' I spoke very earnest, "thar is a horse as is all horse, every little inch o' her."

"Gentle?" says he.

"Mr. Brown," says I, speakin' very slow an' thoughtful, "thar is a little horse that it would be a cryin' shame for any one but a nervous old lady, mother o' eight or ten children dependin' on her, to ride. I'm a cautious man, Mr. Brown—got to be in my business—an' I say it again: thar stands the perfection of a old lady's confidential saddle pony, if she ain't too speedy. I ken see her a packin' old Mrs. Quinlivan, an' enjoyin' the privilege, to one o' them mothers' meetin's she's so stuck on. Gentle! Je-rusalem!"

"I shall tell Mrs. Quinlivan about the pony, John," says Miss Jones, a smilin'.

"Thank y'u kindly, miss," says I, a touchin' me hat.

"Can't have 'em too speedy for some o' them old uns," says Bill, who come along at that moment, a buttin' in. "I mind back in my home town thar was old Mrs. Northumberland. She was a——"

"Mrs. who?" said I.

"Mrs. Northumberland, widdy o' General Washington B. Northumberland. She was eighty-three years old—some folks give her eighty-seven—an' she wouldn't ride nothin' but race horses; papered horses, too, every one of 'em, an' her a mother o' fourteen, an' a grandmother to boot. Well, sir, it was the purtiest thing y'ever seen, her comin' home to supper if she was anyways late, jest a sailin' up Main Street, an' her white hair—she had a ter'ble lot o' it—a flyin' out behind, for all the world like a snowdrift, an'——"

"A what?" says Miss Jones.

"A snowdrift," says Bill.

"Deah me!" says Miss Jones, a larfin'. "What a very charmin' pictchah."

Just then the telephone bell rang an' I sent Bill to answer it.

"Is she handy?" says Mr. Brown, an' he put his ci-gar back in his mouth.

"Turn her on a two-bit piece," says I.

"What is your lowest figure, John?" says he, a workin' his ci-gar back an' forth in his mouth.

"My lowest figure," says I, an' I spoke very careful, bein' honest. "My lowest figure," an' I repeated what I'd said, kind o' musin'. "It's like this. Y'u see thar's Mr. Conyers"—an' I mentioned one o' the best polo players in the country, a big hefty fellow as weighed near two hundred—"don't she look like the mar' as'd pack him nice an' handy? I'll just leave it to you, Mr. Brown."

But he only cracked a dry kind o' a laugh at that an' his ci-gar went out. Then he pointed to her near front foot.

"That hoof'll crack sure," says he.

"Crack nothin'," says I.

"I wouldn't mind bettin' on it," says he, an' he borrowed a match.

"Can she gallop?" says he.

"Can she gallop!" says I, kind o' repeatin' what he said.

Then I walked up to him, an', says I, speakin' very slow an' solemn an' kind o' low—

"Mr. Brown," says I, "that little mar' 'd surprise y'u!"

He looked her over again after that very careful, an' he says somethin' to Miss Jones, but I didn't ketch it, an' she says, a claspin' her hands:

"Algernon, the idea is lovely. It is too sweet!"

An' she sighed again an' looked at the ceilin' o' the stable. Then he speaks to her some more an' says he—

"Hadn't we better drive?" says he.

But she only shakes her head at that, an' says he to me—

"Nice seasonable weather," says he.

"Never seen a pleasanter May," says I.

Then he takes the ci-gar out o' his mouth an' the paper bandage off the middle very careful, an' says he—

"What did you say was your lowest figure, John?" says he.

"A hundred an' twenty-five might tempt me," I says, "but, mind y'u, I ain't sayin' it would."

Well, he just laughed at that an' says he:

"Good day to you, John. It's a very pleasant day," he says.

"Great!" says I, an' away the two o' them goes.

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Well, I guess it was about an hour after that when in comes me bucko again, by himself. I had the pony in a loose box by that time with a light blanket on, eatin' hay an' lookin' like a five hundred dollah racehorse.

"How do do, John," says Mr. Brown, very affable. "The day seems to be turnin' a bit raw," he says.

"It do seem kind o' nippier," I says.

"I've been thinkin'," says he.

"Yes," says I.

"What did you say was your lowest figure?"

"One hundred an' twenty-five," says I. "Y'u see thar's Mr. Conyers——"

"How'd a hundred look?"

"Nothin' doin'," says I.

"A hundred an' ten?"

I shook my head.

"You can give me a bill of sale in the mornin' when I bring you my check," says he.

In the mornin' he brought 'round his check an' a light saddle an' rode the little mar' away.

THREE days later I seen him near the post-office.

"I got rid of the pony you sold me," says he, kind o' short.

"Yes," says I. "Not gentle enough to suit y'u, maybe?"

"Oh, yes," says he. "It was gentle enough."

"Wasn't it handy?" says I.

"Never saw a handier pony," says he.

"Then it was exactly what I said it was?" says I.

"Exactly," says he, kind o' sarcastic-like, I thought.

"Whatever was wrong with it?" says I.

"It was the slowest thing I ever sat on," says he.

"Mr. Brown," says I, "didn't I tell y'u it'd surprise y'u?"

"Yes," says he, "an' it sure did."

I just merely re-call that as a little in-s'ance of how truthfulness an' strict honesty, even in horse-dealin', if it ain't carried too far, is the best policy.

Well, so long, boys. It's a real pleasant September we're havin'.

PRIVATE HARRIS

by W. TOWNEND

THIS is merely a straightforward endeavor to set down a few incidents in the career of Charles Harris, private in a regiment of the Line. He was born in a back slum of a large town in the north of England, and much to the surprise of his parents did not immediately die, as numerous brothers and sisters had done. His mother was a charwoman; his father a fish-hawker, and though doubtless worthy, was unsuccessful in trade and given to strong drink. Charles, the only surviving child, was left an orphan at the early age of seven and was adopted by his

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maternal aunt, who complained bitterly as to the injustice of her lot.

Now life in the neighborhood wherein dwelt Charles Harris is unmistakably based on the law of the survival of the fittest. Yet, strange to say, Charles Harris survived.

At nineteen he was small and stunted, with a pale face, slack mouth and shifty eyes. For a living he sold newspapers outside a public house. He had few recreations, but for eight months in the year he was an enthusiastic supporter of the local football team, and on Saturdays might be found exercising his lungs at First League matches, shrieking with joy when one of his heroes fouled an opponent or howling curses when the referee displeased him. Cricket he regarded as uninteresting, but he had once attended an England and Australia test match in his extreme youth.

For the rest, he had no regard for the truth, he was phenomenally lazy, he smoked innumerable cigarettes and appreciated and encouraged the taste of beer.

Probably he would have continued in this manner to the end of his existence had he not chanced to fall in love with a Miss Jane Martin's wage-earning capacity. Most unhappily, however, Miss Jane Martin saw fit to scoff at his advances.

"Wot! Marry a thing like you! Why, I could lick yer with one hand tied behind me back." Love, in other words, reduced to its primal elements.

Mr. Harris slunk away, soured by the shame of his defeat, and considered his position carefully over a half pint. Money was scarce, his prospects were gloomy, he hated the idea of work. As for Miss Martin, he thought of her with loathing.

To be brief, recording his doings without comment, Mr. Harris chanced upon a recruiting-sergeant and recklessly announced his intention of enlisting. The sergeant eyed him moodily from head to foot.

"S'elp me! If they take you, they'll take anything." He paused and rubbed his chin doubtfully. "Howsomever, miracles 'ave 'appened before now. Come along."

Obviously another miracle must have happened, as Mr. Harris passed the doctor. He had no organic disease, his sight was excellent, his teeth sound; his chest measurement was less than the limit, as was his height, but six months' training, so it was agreed, would remedy these defects.

Hence Mr. Harris became Private Harris, the protector of fifty-one fellow citizens —this calculation being based on the most accurate statistics.

AFTER several months of incessant drill and gymnastics at the regimental depot Private Harris, very much dazed and bewildered, aching in each limb, joined the Battalion at Aldershot, where he at once encountered a certain amount of hostile criticism. His roommates were not impressed by his appearance or manners, and said so plainly.

Private Harris, awed by his surroundings, sat on his bed-cot and stared nervously about him, suspicious of danger.

"And what made *you* enlist?" said Private Longhurst, a broad-shouldered, solemn-faced man, after an earnest inspection of his looks and bearing.

"To become a defender of 'is native land, of course, same as us," said Private Norton, the accepted wit of the Company. "Wasn't that it?" Private Harris pondered deeply and spoke the truth.

"I dunno," he remarked cautiously.

"Come here!" Private Longhurst, more solemn than ever, grasped him by the collar and drew him to his feet. "There's some things you got to learn and learn quick, and the best way to learn 'em is with a belt. Understand?" Private Harris did not understand, but something in Longhurst's tone made him shiver.

"Wotcher doin'?" he said. "I ain't 'urtin' yer."

"No," said Longhurst, "you ain't. Ar hate to do it, but Ar'm goin' to make a soldier of you some'ow. Judgin' from your looks an' the way your tunic sets it's goin' to be 'ard work, all the same. An' don't you never glare at me like that. It's rude." And Private Longhurst shook him gently to and fro.

On the parade ground Private Harris was the despair of every non-commissioned officer with whom he came into contact. He was dull-witted and stupid, incapable of grasping the simplest explanations. Consequently, in spite of his course at the depot and Longhurst's belt, it was many weeks before he was passed as a duty man and relieved of the burden of his recruit's drill.

"*Can't* you understand what I'm tellin' you? Now, when I give the command:

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'Front form!' " And a long-suffering sergeant would explain once more.

"Yessir," Private Harris would reply, anxious to please, and straightway repeat the same mistake once more.

Taking everything into consideration, it was not surprising that Private Harris figured prominently at pack drill and fatigues, whilst on varying terms of C. B.* There was indeed only one bugle call which he could pick out with any certainty, and that the Defaulters.

"Didn't you hear the bugle?" he had been asked on a much-to-be-regretted occasion.

"Yes, sergeant."

"Why the devil didn't you answer it, then?"

"Please, sergeant, I didn't quite know what it were; not—not 'aving an ear for music." Which statement was most unjustly regarded as a piece of gross impertinence, and led to trouble.

But Private Harris, possessing in no small degree one virtue of the British soldier, bore his many trials with stoicism. As far back as he could remember, he had been accustomed to abuse which, as he knew, did not hurt. So he listened unmoved while his superiors raged, considering that a meat dinner each day more than compensated for having to wear uncomfortable clothes and being punished if—as had happened—he omitted to wash his neck.

But punishments inflicted by authority were as nothing to the punishments he bore at the hands of Private Longhurst, who by methods of his own was slowly instructing him in the duties of a soldier—without, however, much success.

"If," said Longhurst at the close of a long and trying day, "any one could make you look like anything but a paralyzed militiaman they'd deserve to be made Commander in Chief of the 'ole British Army. But if you get hauled for dirty on parade again, my son, which is gettin' to be a 'abit of yours, I'll belt you so as you never go on parade again ever, soldier or no soldier."

"Er!" said Private Harris timorously, foreseeing trouble.

"Harris," said Longhurst with the relentlessness of Fate "come 'ere! Stand up. *'Shun!* Hold your head up, can't you! Now, repeat accordin' as you've been taught the battles of this Reg'ment. Come on or——"

And Private Harris, very miserable and wrathful, recited the list with many stumblings, being threatened ferociously for leaving out Sevastopol and hesitating at the dates that followed Afghanistan, while the other occupants of the room roared.

He did not go on furlough as he might have done, having no desire to visit his ancestral home; and, in due course, after the usual worry and confusion inseparable from a change of station, he departed with the Regiment to Gibraltar.

PRIVATE HARRIS had left his native land without feeling any particular regret, nor was he in any way stirred by his new surroundings. Fatigues, parades, kit inspection and musketry were, he found, as unavoidable on the Rock as at Aldershot; also dirty buttons and accouterments as obnoxious to authority and Private Longhurst.

Thus Harris did not sympathize with Private Norton when, in a guard hut on the North Front, he gave way to homesickness.

"Ar'd give a month's pay to be back again. 'Baccy's dirt cheap, but it's a rotten 'ole. Yes, from Bayside Barrier to Windmill 'Ill, also this everlastin' Neutral Ground, a rotten 'ole. Nothing but sentry-go, mornin', noon an' night."

Private Harris, not understanding, made no answer.

"There were a girl at 'ome," continued Norton. "But, Lord! Ar won't be back again, Gawd only knows. She'll forget me an' take up with some one else, an'—— Why didn't we take Linea and a bit more while we was about it, so's to 'ave room to breathe?"

With which patriotic sentiment he rolled over and went to sleep.

Private Harris made the acquaintance of only one girl while they were in Gibraltar, and this, added to the rebuff he had received from Miss Martin, only tended to strengthen him in his distrust of the sex.

She was dark-haired and dark-eyed, and he met her in the Alameda one glorious Summer evening, while listening to the band.

Marveling at his boldness, Private Harris introduced himself in the time-honored fashion.

* C. B.—Confined to barracks.

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"Vell, you fonny leettle man!" said she at last, as they walked toward the Heathfield Steps.

"It's a—a fine evenin', miss," said Private Harris, trying to appear at his ease. "As fine an evening as——"

"You say dat before." She yawned and fanned herself.

Private Harris inflated his chest, squared his shoulders and tapped his leg with his swagger-stick.

"Big place, ain't it, miss? Very big place; 'ighest 'ill I've come acrost."

"Vait! Dere a friend of mine."

She darted across and shook hands with an artilleryman, chattering with excitement. Private Harris lit a cigarette and gazed reflectively at the huge outline of the Rock bulking against the blue sky. Much to his bewilderment, he did not see his companion again. He was quite worried about her disappearance, and spoke about it on his return to barracks.

"An' when I turns 'round—I own I was lookin' at that there mountain a good spell —when I turns 'round, she were gone. I do 'ope she don't think I run off an' left 'er. I was just lookin' at that there mountain, an' when——"

Longhurst sat upright on his cot and stared at him in silent wonderment.

"Ho! Ho! Ho!" roared Private Norton. "You'll be the death of me, young 'Arris!"

"The pore girl's probably waitin' for you now, cryin' 'er eyes out," said another imaginative private.

"I wouldn't 'ave 'er think I was rude a purpose," observed Private Harris.

"Dry up, for Gawd's sake!" said Longhurst. "Calls himself a soldier, an' lets a flat-footed garrison gunner run off with his girl. You're a bally disgrace, an' always will be."

And in the opinion of his hearers Private Longhurst was right. Indeed, Private Harris was contemptible from whatever point of view. He was despised by his roommates, the butt for their jokes. He was the prey of the unscrupulous who borrowed his money and drank at his expense. He was generous, not from inclination but from policy.

"Why the —— don't you go for him, young 'Arris?" asked Norton as he surveyed a by no means unusual scene.

Private Harris dodged a boot flung from the opposite side of the room, and laughed feebly.

"Er, what? Oh! It don't signify," he replied, picking up his kit from the floor where it had been ruthlessly scattered.

"Him!" said his assailant grinning cheerfully. " 'E 'asn't got the pluck of a louse; I'll teach 'im. 'Ere, you put them things down. Go on! Sharp!"

"Don't *you*, Harris," said Private Norton. "Knock his head off."

Private Harris looked frightened. "It don't matter," he said, and dropped his belongings obediently.

"Don't matter! Tell yer what it is, young Harris, you're a bally coward, that's what you are! Why don't you 'it 'im? Ar've a good mind to give you a hiding myself."

Longhurst, who had been watching with a grin on his face, interfered.

"Shut it, Alf! 'Ere, young Smith, you're a fat lot of good yourself, aren't you? You leave him alone. Lick 'im! Of course you could lick 'im. Who couldn't? But you go an' 'it Norton an' see how it feels. Alf, Smith is going to hit you. Go on, Smith, hit Norton; 'e's big enough."

That same evening Longhurst overtook Harris on his way to the canteen. He caught him by his elbow.

"Harris, 'ere! What's the matter with you? Come on, now; out with it! You don't seem like a man at all. If any one 'ad belted me as I've belted you, I'd shoot 'im. Why don't you stand up for yourself, eh?"

"What's the good?" said Private Harris sullenly. "They'd 'arf kill me."

Longhurst eyed him from head to foot and then turned on his heel.

"What's the odds if they do? They'd think more of you than they do now, by a —— sight."

But Private Harris knew better.

SUMMER came around once more, and Private Harris roasted in the heat until his snub nose peeled; he bathed, boated, fished, tried his hand at cricket—most unsuccessfully—and otherwise existed.

Nothing moved him—not even the rumble of gun wheels and the dreary crawl through crowded Waterport out to the Cemetery, with the Jack-covered coffin, while the "Dead March" wailed and the black-muffled drums throbbed sadly.

Private Harris considered such cere-

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monies as merely adding to his work and therefore unnecessary.

"'Shun! Present arms! Shoulder arms! With blank cartridge—ready! Fire three volleys in the air! Present!"

And so on. Why couldn't they get it over without so much fuss over a dead man? thought Private Harris as he raised his rifle. A question which he was wise enough not to put into words.

Private Harris naturally did not read the newspapers, nor did he pay overmuch attention to the rumors of the canteen and barracks. There was a vague unrest throughout the garrison, and talk of a possible war in South Africa.

One stifling evening he sat smoking with some other men on a low wall overlooking the Bay. His eyes wandered idly across the jumble of trees and roofs down to the yellow-funneled battleships at the New Mole, on toward Algeciras opposite.

"Just think," said Norton dreamily. "Every yard a'most of this 'ole covered with guns! Guns an' guns! And if we was attacked 'ere, my Gawd! Wouldn't we 'ave to blasted well fight?"

"Ah! Bit more of a prison than it is at present! Think they'd ever get in?"

"Nah! Get in! no —— fear!"

"If the French or Spaniards ever did take it," said Longhurst, "it 'ud cost them more'n it would us."

"We ain't never been beaten yet, 'ave we?"

"Of course we 'ave, same as every one else. Only it ain't much talked about. Majuba, Maiwand, Isandlana. We've a way of gettin' cut up 'andsome occasionally. Here, Harris, wake up! What 'ud you do if there was a siege 'ere? On the Rock for months an' months; bein' fired at from all 'round; gettin' killed an' so on. 'Ow'd yer like that, eh?"

"I dunno." It had never occurred to Private Harris that being killed was any part of what was expected of him.

Longhurst spat contemptuously.

"Don't worry. We wouldn't take you into action, anyway."

"Why not?" asked Private Harris, very much surprised.

"Becorse we've got some self-respect, that's why," said Longhurst, and the men chuckled.

Harris pondered on what Longhurst had said, and he felt vaguely uneasy and disturbed.

"Why not?" he said thickly. "Why wouldn't I go?"

Longhurst turned and looked at him.

"Why not!" said he. "Becorse, Harris, you know as well as we do what 'ud happen."

Harris cleared his throat.

"What would 'appen?" he said slowly.

"You'd bring shame on the Reg'ment—but what's the Reg'ment to you? Nothin.' You'd take to your 'eels an' run. Why, man! You'll let fellers say what they like of you to your face, call you names no man should hear, an' you won't raise a hand. You'll take a coward's blow without a word."

"But—but it's different in a battle," said Private Harris.

"A battle! Listen to 'im! If you're afraid to stand up to bare fists what would you do if we was facing bullets or bayonets? Man! You'd die of fear."

Private Harris did not move, but stared at the red afterglow beyond the mountains opposite. His eyes were blurred, and he had a queer tightness in his throat.

Nobody spoke, and after a time Private Harris slipped to the ground and walked slowly away.

Toward the end of the Summer the Battalion, wildly excited, left for Natal.

"WHERE'S the fightin'?" asked Private Norton wearily. "Here we are kept waiting about in this Ladysmith an' never a sign of a Boger. Might as well have stuck at Maritzburg—or Gib."

"T'other chaps up at Dundee 'ull get it. Then it 'ull be our turn."

"They says there's a —— of a lot of 'em; big guns, artillery and all sorts of things. Won't be a picnic at the Cork Woods neither, with buns an' tea."

"Bogers, they're no good!"

"You wait till you've met some of 'em."

"'Arris," said Norton grinning, "are you lookin' forward to that battle you used to be always talkin' about?"

"I dunno," was the doubtful answer. "Don't suppose I'll mind it more'n any one else."

Private Norton got up slowly, stretching himself. "—— these 'ere moldy, worm-eaten, Gawd-forsaken 'ills; Ar'm sick of ther sight of them! Ar think Ar'll turn in, now. Whether we fight or not don't much

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matter; plenty of sleep an' plenty of grub's what counts. Don't it, 'Arris, my beauty? An' like as not we won't get much of neither, pretty soon."

Two days later, at six o'clock in the morning, half the Battalion moved out of Ladysmith by rail, following the mounted troops, who had started a couple of hours earlier by road; and Private Harris saw the enemy for the first time.

"What're we goin' to do here, Ar wonder?" said Private Longhurst, pointing across the uneven stretch of *veld* to the cluster of tin houses and trees beyond.

"Don't know an' don't care," said another. "Look over yonder, Longhurst. That 'ill reminds me of 'ome; don't it? Pit mouth, railway, coal—everything. Ar'd like to ask what sort of props they uses."

Private Harris did not follow the movements of the next few hours with any very close attention. When the field guns opened fire he felt no curiosity as to the effect of the shells; not even when he heard a sergeant laugh cheerfully—

"Good shot; slap into the station!"

But he shivered as the Boer artillery thundered a reply.

"My Gawd! They're shootin' at us," he stuttered. Then he relapsed into a stupor, fearful of what might be required of him, his heart thumping unsteadily at each crash.

When he caught the muttered, discontented:

"—— it! Goin' back, are we? What the ——'s that for?" he rejoiced. Despair again seized him when he was assured that they were merely being withdrawn in order to await reënforcements.

After three dreary hours he was aroused by Longhurst's voice.

"Here come the guns! In a 'urry, aren't they? Double teams, too."

" 'Ope we smash 'em soon; Ar'm fair sick of this messin' about," said a Lance Corporal.

"Cavalry'll be in action before us, anyhow," said Longhurst. "It's just like a perishin' Fox Hills field day—just. Sweatin' us out here as if we'd no time ter spare, an' then wastin' the whole bloomin' mornin'. P'r'aps they've forgot the humpires."

The Lance Corporal yawned.

"Ah! It's as bad as waitin' about 'fore you goes in to bat."

Private Harris sat silent, hour after hour, his eyes dull and heavy, his pimply face white under his big khaki-covered helmet. He fidgeted uneasily, fingering the bolt and sling of his rifle; quite content to remain inactive, doing nothing. It came as a shock when Longhurst nudged him.

"Now, then, Harris, wake up! They've got the ridge, and 'ere's the rest of the infantry. Look alive!"

Private Harris was dimly conscious of a field officer—he did not know who or what he was—addressing them as they stood formed up in brigade line of quarter columns, telling them quietly that he hoped they would take the hills by sunset.

Private Harris sniffed as the regiments cheered wildly.

"Come on, Harris," said Longhurst; and they moved off toward the ridge held by the Light Horse.

Private Harris made no reply, but strode on, chewing his chin strap, and glancing quickly from side to side.

"They're hard at it, t'other side of the railway, ain't they?" continued Longhurst. " 'Ark at them 'ammerin' each other!"

"My Gawd!" said Private Harris. "Oh, my Gawd!" and ducked, weak-kneed, as the Boer guns came into action against them.

A field battery galloped up and unlimbered on their left.

" 'Ellish row those guns kick up; wish they'd get through with it. 'Ullo! Boers chokin' off, eh?"

"Shrapnel, now, that white smoke; ain't it, Norton? It's getting dark over there, eh?"

"Ar! That's thunder, that is. There'll be a storm in a jiffy, and Ar've left my rumbereller at 'ome. Lord! Ar'm glad where that pitched ain't 'ere. Poor beggars!"

As they advanced, they watched the shells bursting on the hills, behind which black clouds were massing. Private Harris shuddered and spake in a quavering voice.

"Wot the —— dud-do they want us to dud-do? Don't expect us to gug-go up there, do they? Where're the rest of the fellers? Wot the —— do they ——"

Longhurst looked at him with a curious smile.

"Feeling queer, eh? Well, so 'm I. We all are—bleeding queer. Only yer mustn't let on that you are. The Jocks are just

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behind us, too. What're the Bogers playin' at now?"

A sharp word of command; the khaki lines halted and lay down, sheltered from the enemy by a dip in the ground.

"—— it!" moaned Private Harris. "W'y cawn't we keep on an' 'ave done with it? Or why cawn't we chuck it altogether? I don't want to——"

"Oh, dry up, young 'Arris, or you'll get a smack on ther jaw."

At last they rose to their feet and plunged forward once more, curving around toward the enemy's left flank under a desultory shell fire.

Private Harris, terrified, realizing now what was expected of him, hesitated for a moment and lagged back. But at a sergeant's gruff: "Close up there, close up!" he hurried on, the ingrained discipline of the parade ground overpowering his natural instinct to escape while there was yet time.

They reached the jagged, rock-strewn crest of the ridge, and there were met by a withering, screeching blast from the hidden enemy.

"Oh! My Gawd!" said Private Harris helplessly. "Oh, my Gawd! My Gawd!" and he whimpered like a hurt child at the whistle of the bullets and the sight of men dropping on either side.

Before them was a long stretch of open ground sloping down gradually, bare of cover, and crossed by a barbed-wire fence; farther on were the *kopjes* and the Boer position which they were to storm.

Scattered among the rocks, they answered the fierce growl of the Mausers, losing heavily.

Private Harris fired rapidly without aiming, fumbling in feverish haste at his pouches. Longhurst, who was crouched behind the same boulder, leaned over toward him.

"You're doin' a fat lot o' good, aren't yer? Put your 'ead up, for 'Eaven's sake; look what you're shootin' at! Be a man, 'Arris; go on!"

"I cawn't. I cawn't," groaned Harris. "I'll be killed."

Longhurst laughed grimly as he reloaded.

"You'll 'ave to, any 'ow, whether yer wants to or not." He fired carefully.

SOME officers ran forward and cut the wires. Private Harris shut his eyes, shivering; Longhurst laughed again. A brief word and they gathered themselves together for the rush.

"Up yer gets, 'Arris; look alive!" shouted Longhurst.

Private Harris was on his face, deadly sick, clutching his rifle.

"Oh, my Gawd! I cawn't; s'elp me, I cawn't. You may belt me again, but I cawn't. *I* didn't wanter fight; *I* didn't ——"

Longhurst turned swiftly.

"Get up, Harris, —— you! Get up or Ar'll kill you. Man, there's other regiments here watchin' us. 'Ave you no guts? All right, then, stay where you are an' be —— for a —— coward!" And Longhurst left him.

A moment later Private Harris, wondering when would come the bullet, staggered to his feet with a sob and made for the fence in front.

"It's awful!" he sobbed. "It's awful!"

He noticed that the men nearest him were Gordon Highlanders, their dark kilts and sporrans swinging as they ran. A queer, half-formed feeling of shame urged him on.

At the straggling, twisted wires, where the dead clustered in heaps, he fell, quivering with terror, unable to stir. Longhurst, his khaki red-splashed, writhed in agony. Harris looked at him in awe.

"Gawd! it's—it's Longhurst."

"Go on, young Harris," whispered the wounded man.

"—— you, Longhurst!" said Private Harris. "Let me be! I'll be killed, d'jer hear, if I ——"

His voice rose, high-pitched and cracked.

"Killed! Get on, man, get on; you and I can't stay here when the Reg'ment's into 'em. Ar'm better now. Ar'm comin' along, too." He made an effort to rise.

"Wait for me, Harris; Ar'm comin'." He groped for his rifle with bent fingers. "We'll show 'em; we'll——"

He crawled forward a few feet, choking with pain, but collapsed suddenly on to his elbow.

"Ar'm done," he said faintly. A trickle of blood came from the corner of his mouth. "Go on, lad, there's—the Reg'ment—waitin' for yer!"

Private Harris gave a little yelp, and Longhurst rolled over on his back, his eyes wide open, his coarse lips curled away from his teeth in a savage grin.

Dazed and stupefied, Harris rose to his knees, forgetful of his danger.

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"Longhurst!" he said. "Longhurst—wot the ——'s up? Wot is it? Cawn't yer say something?"

He broke off in despair and peered at Longhurst's distorted features.

"Longhurst! Wake up!"

He shook him timidly by the shoulder, and only then did he realize the truth.

"My Gawd! 'E's—'e's dead; they've shot 'im!" A bullet grazed his cheek, and he laughed wildly.

A subaltern whipping up stragglers caught sight of his small, huddled figure. "Hi! Come on, man, buck up!"

Private Harris eyed him for a moment incuriously, without moving, grappling with a great resolve. Then he bent over what had once been Longhurst, the man who had belted him and bullied him and made life a burden for him, and he touched the limp body lightly.

"Good-by, old chum; I won't forget."

His fear had left him; he stood up, a dull feeling of anger in his heart, and stepping over the wires, stumbled forward toward the firing line.

It was raining now; the shock of the stinging, ice-cold drops made him gasp for breath as he struggled on. He was a slow runner, but by instinct he went straight, the shortest path; slipping in the mud, scrambling over rocks and half-hidden corpses, his throat dry and parched, his eyes, smarting with the sting of the rain, stubbornly fixed on the death-dealing hill ahead.

Men of his own Company, who had known him since he was a recruit, who had laughed at him and mocked at him, who had treated him as so much dirt, marveled as they beheld him plodding along, head erect, unmindful of the bullets.

A big corporal, puffing heavily at his side, glanced over his shoulder.

"Good boy; give 'em socks!" He threw up his arms and sprawled headlong. Private Harris swerved.

"Out of the light, you ——" And he kept on his way.

His brain had long since ceased to work; he had no clear idea of anything save that he had watched Longhurst die and that therefore he must kill. He had forgotten his weariness; he saw nothing but the face of the *kopje* up which he was to force his precious body.

Dimly he was aware of hoarse shouts and orders, of blinding flashes and the *crack! crack! crack!* of rifles, of the pressure of eager men drunk with battle, of foul barrack oaths and howls of rage, of the smell of earth and wet leather, of death hideous and violent.

A hand gripped his haversack and pulled him back.

"Steady, you fool!"

Dreaming, he heard the oft-repeated "Fix bayonets!" and tugged obediently; only half awake, the "Charge!"

To the tingling, vengeful music of the bugles and skirling pipes, the sweating, panting lines surged up. And Private Harris found himself, yelling madly, in the midst of a frenzied mob, men of four regiments, racing toward the guns.

The clamor died down abruptly, giving place in its stead to a sullen calm.

"White flag!" shouted some one; and the "Cease Fire" rang out.

The soldiers halted on the reverse slope.

Private Harris lowered his rifle and staggered across to one of the captured guns, coughing weakly. It was all over, then, and:

"My Gawd!" he said again as he remembered Longhurst. "My Gawd!"

"'Ullo, young 'Arris! It is you, then, after all."

Norton, the humorist, bareheaded, with bloodshot eyes, his face and uniform plastered with mud, approached, limping.

"Good boy!"

"Blast you! Leave me alone, Norton!" growled Private Harris in a sudden fury, wiping his mouth with his knuckles. "Clear out, an' ——" His mood changed.

"Oh, my Gawd! Norton, I'm sick; I seen Longhurst killed, an' ——"

"All right! Won't do no good to think of 'im. 'Ere! Wot the——"

The Boers were scrambling up the hill, firing at the scattered soldiers. From the *kop* behind the camp there came a roar of musketry.

"They're on us," said Norton. "Get back, man, quick!"

"Go to ——!" retorted Private Harris.

Norton pitched against him; his foot slipped and he fell heavily.

The British wavered, and like the setback of a wave retired, while the enemy swarmed toward the captured guns.

Private Harris rose shakily and spat with bitter scorn as he looked back.

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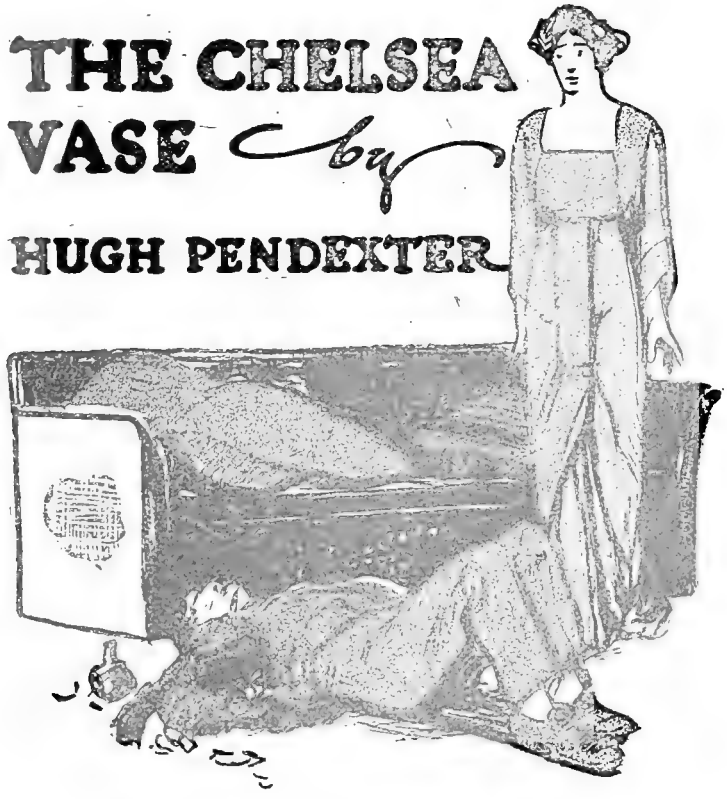
"By ——! You're a fine set o' cowards! W'y don't yer run a bit faster? Oh, you beauties!" He made no attempt to escape, but, gripping his rifle tightly, stepped over Norton's body, his snub-nosed face set in a perplexed smile as if he were grappling with some problem too deep for his feeble brain.

A large, bearded man in a gray suit fired, and the bullet tore through his sodden helmet. At which Private Harris snarled, and charging forward drove his bayonet into the soft flesh. As the Boer went over with a faint moan, he wrenched his rifle around and pulled.

"Come on, you swine! Come on!" he shouted. Lifting up his rifle, the red bayonet well over his left shoulder, he brought the butt down with all his force, making a hideous ruin of a man standing against a gun wheel. Then, still wearing the same perplexed smile, Private Harris was shot down as the troops advanced once more in the gathering darkness.



CHAPTER I

THE INQUEST

THE culture and wealth of Jacob Dustin forced all known details of his violent death into typographical prominence as soon as his body was discovered by his granddaughter, Miss Ruth Hayes.

Dustin was celebrated on two continents as an authority on all that pertained to *bric-à-brac* and antiques, while his private collection had involved the expenditure of a fortune. The Coroner and police from the start proclaimed that he had been murdered most foully, and the various inexplicable phases of the case afforded the newswriters much relish and provided an abundance of sensational copy.

The alarm had been given by Miss Hayes shortly after midnight, and on arriving at

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the mansion the police officials found the deceased lying face downward on the rug in the library, dead from a wound in the neck that had severed the jugular vein. Some narrow-bladed knife had obviously inflicted the mortal blow, and as no weapon was found in the room the theory of suicide could not be entertained by even the most fanciful.

The fragments of a Chelsea vase were found near the body, portions of it reduced to particles and powder. Among the fragments was an unbroken vase, of a dark blue-and-gold color scheme, rococo in form and design, with *rocaille* handles; a beautiful type of eighteenth-century art. The two vases figured prominently in the first news stories, as the reporters were curious enough to speculate why only one of the pair should be shattered.

Miss Hayes, who possessed an intimate knowledge of her grandfather's collection, informed the Coroner that the two vases were valuable and had been highly prized by the deceased. It was the theory of the police that Mr. Dustin was struck down while examining the pair and that by chance one happened to escape injury.

The only other signs of disorder in the room were a bronze, some three feet in height, representing a Viking stepping ashore from his venturesome craft, and the overturned drawer of a small desk. The bronze was on the floor, as if knocked aside by the murderer, either as he sprang upon his victim or when he was escaping from the room. The drawer rested upside down on top of the desk, surrounded by a mass of papers and notebooks. It was patent that some one had hurriedly pawed the papers over while searching for something.

In later editions the Coroner was quoted as wishing to interview John Hayes, Miss Ruth's brother, but unable to get in touch with him. Richard Ashley, an artist and intimate friend of young Hayes and the last person seen with him, professed entire ignorance of the missing man's whereabouts.

After the leakage of possible clues was effectually stopped, the reporters continued making copy by building up various clever theories, through the device of skilfully knitting together bits and hints of information. The impression generally obtained that young Hayes was the pivotal character in the case.

Public interest was at fever heat when the inquest opened. An inquest ordinarily creates but little excitement. In the Dustin case the press table was crowded and the room filled to overflowing.

The Coroner, a slow, heavy type of a man, irritated those reporters who had early editions to catch by lingering at length on the testimony of the coroner's physician. The latter used up an hour in describing the mortal wound, interlarding his evidence with technical terms understood only by surgeons.

While the physician was on the stand, killing valuable time from the viewpoint of the press, one of the reporters happened to glance toward the rear of the room and instantly began writing with frantic energy. His fellows, scenting possibilities, wheeled in their chairs, and the star man of the *Globe* chuckled and whispered, "So the Bureau of Abnormal Litigation is in on the deal, eh?"

This remark was evoked by the entrance of a white-haired man, who edged into a seat near the door and carefully followed the physician's testimony.

At one side of the room, just back of the Assistant District Attorney, Chapel by name—an unusually keen fellow in criminal matters—sat Miss Hayes, Ashley the artist, Nathan Cromb, who was an intimate friend of the dead man, and one of the Dustin domestics.

AFTER the physician finished, the Coroner motioned for Miss Hayes to take the stand. As she glided to the witness chair the white-haired lawyer advanced a few seats, studying her closely. She was very pale, but had not lost all her beauty because of grief. Ashley's solicitous mien as he gazed after her reënforced the press table's conviction that he was in love with the girl.

After the usual preliminary questions as to her name and relationship to the deceased, Chapel requested—

"Miss Hayes, please describe the ground floor of your home, especially the entrances and exits of the library and adjoining room, which I believe is styled the study."

In a low clear voice the witness began:

"The front door opens into a vestibule. From the vestibule you enter the reception hall. The first door at the right opens into the library. Beyond that is a door which

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opens into the study. The study and library are connected by a broad archway. From the study you can pass into a small hall which leads to a side door, opening on to the grounds."

"Where else does the small hall lead to?" broke in the Coroner:

"Nowhere. My grandfather often used it in slipping in and out of the house when he didn't care to use the front door."

"How many keys were there to that side door?" inquired Chapel.

"Only the one my grandfather carried. You wouldn't need a key in going out, as it was a spring lock."

Chapel picked up a small key from the table and informed the Coroner:

"This is the key the witness refers to. It was found on Mr. Dustin's person, you'll recollect."

Then to the witness—

"Proceed, Miss Hayes."

"Across the hall from the library and study are two living-rooms connected by an archway. From the rear living-room there is a door that opens on to a veranda. There is no approach to the veranda from the grounds. At the end of the reception hall is the stairway leading to the second floor. Back of the two living-rooms is the dining-room, then the butler's pantry and the kitchen.

"A rear door, used by tradesmen, opens into a lower hall, from which you can pass up three steps to the kitchen or down into the basement. Back of the study and off the hall running to the kitchen is a small room occupied by the cook."

"The veranda was for privacy? There are no step leading from it?" asked Chapel.

"The veranda had no approach from the grounds. To leave it or gain it one would have to climb over the railing."

"Miss Hayes, at what time did you discover your grandfather's body?"

"It was shortly after midnight." Her voice for the first time gave a hint of weakness. The press table stiffened as the climax was approached.

"Where were you just prior to making the discovery?"

She hesitated for the fraction of a second, and then replied—

"I was on the veranda."

"Of course you were fully dressed?"

"I was." The last was so low the Coroner asked her to repeat it.

Chapel's voice was almost indifferent as he continued—

"You were in the habit of remaining on the veranda till after midnight?"

"No," she faintly replied.

"Then would you please explain how you happened to be there on this particular night?" relentlessly pursued Chapel. The reporters' pencils quickened as they turned off the copy, and messenger boys silently pressed forward to answer the impatient beckoning of a hand.

If possible, the witness's pallor increased; and an attendant felt impelled to place noiselessly a glass of water at her right hand. She raised the glass, but set it down untasted, and in a hurried monotone explained—

"I was expecting my brother to arrive from town."

"Meaning from New York. Exactly," murmured Chapel. "What trains arrive about midnight?"

"None that I know of. The last local comes in at nine thirty."

"Then you expected him to come by some other conveyance?" said Chapel.

"I expected him to drive out home with his friend, Mr. Ashley. They did so arrive."

"And you met them and welcomed them?"

"No."

The monosyllable caused Chapel's brows to crawl upward in a pantomime of surprise —counterfeited—and to glance toward the reporters knowingly.

"Suppose you tell in your own way, Miss Hayes, what you observed while waiting on the veranda till after midnight, also explaining why you didn't welcome your brother and his friend," suggested Chapel, now watching her keenly.

Her gaze rested for a moment on the distressed features of the artist and then passed to the serene countenance of the old lawyer. Lowering her eyes, she began:

"I heard the car stop in front of the house. I knew it contained my brother and Mr. Ashley. I walked to the end of the veranda, but as it does not extend to the end of the house I was unable to see them. I saw the light cast by their auto lamps and heard and recognized their voices."

"What did they say?" quickly interrupted the Coroner.

"I heard Mr. Ashley say, 'I'll carry it for you.' "

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"Just a moment," said the Assistant District Attorney. "What time was this?"

"About half after eleven, I should judge," slowly decided the witness. The Coroner nodded for her to proceed with her testimony, and she resumed—

"I heard them run up the steps and enter."

"Without ringing the bell?" This rather sharply from Chapel.

"Yes; I had left the door unlocked, as I knew they'd arrive late. If my grandfather's library lamp was out, they could pass up to their rooms without disturbing him."

"You had communicated with them in order to know they were coming?" obtruded the Coroner.

She bit her lips nervously and admitted:

"I had talked with Mr. Ashley over the telephone that afternoon. He said he was coming with John. I did not talk with my brother, as he was out on some business matter at the time."

"Your brother had just returned from abroad?" asked Chapel.

"That very day." Her voice was trembling now to the verge of tears. "They entered the house, and I remained on the veranda. I knew John ought to see grandfather first, so I kept out of the way."

"But didn't you see and speak with Mr. Ashley?"

"No. He entered the libray with John. I waited some time on the veranda and then stepped into the living-room. After a few moments I returned to the veranda."

"Did you hear any one talking in the library while you were in the living-room?" asked Chapel.

"I did," she faintly admitted.

"Were their voices pitched in a high, excited key, or in the ordinary, conversational key?"

"Their voices were quite loud, but I don't believe they were quarreling."

Chapel's face reflected his satisfaction at this qualified admission and he smoothly urged—

"But you had thought they might quarrel?"

SHE cast her gaze wildly about the room as if seeking for some avenue of escape. Not until she encountered the placid eyes of the old lawyer did she seem enabled to reply; then she slowly said:

"My grandfather didn't like my brother's habits of traveling over Europe. He never directly forbade his wandering, but he would have preferred to have John stay at home and enter some business. Although devoting his own life to collecting works of art, he was very impatient with young men who traveled or took up with the fine arts unless such occupations helped them to be self-dependent."

"Wasn't your grandfather a bit prejudiced against Mr. Ashley?" asked Chapel.

"He—he admired art, but didn't care much for artists," she confessed.

"I see. And hearing loud voices, you retired to the veranda. Now what made you go to the library after midnight instead of retiring to your room?"

"I heard the car roll away. I had expected them to remain all night. I waited some time before entering the house and going to the library."

"Why did you wait?"

Her lips trembled, but she bravely answered:

"I—I was crying. I had no heart to retire. I waited nearly thirty minutes after the clock struck twelve, I should say, before I entered the house."

"But why did you go to the library instead of going upstairs?" persisted Chapel.

"I wanted to talk with grandfather about John. Grandfather, while often impatient with others, especially with John, was very fond of me and allowed me to speak quite freely. So I entered the library—and found him dead."

She broke down at this point and wept silently.

"That will do, Miss Hayes," kindly relented Chapel. "You may retire to one of the side rooms till you've composed yourself if you desire. Nathan Cromb!"

Mr. Cromb was a man of some thirty-five years, scholarly and refined in appearance. Before taking the stand he escorted Miss Hayes to a side room and closed the door after her. His examination was very brief. He modestly admitted he was something of a connoisseur in art and that he was capable of giving expert testimony on antiques and curios. In this connection, he explained, he had worked very closely with Mr. Dustin for several years, and had profited greatly by the old collector's instructions.

Then he was shown the shards of the broken vase and promptly identified them as

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belonging to the second of the pair of Chelsea vases. Mr. Dustin had purchased them about two weeks prior to his death and had exhibited them to the witness the night before the homicide. He was excused, and Richard Ashley was requested to take his place.

The artist was visibly disturbed. His hand shook as he raised it in taking the oath, and his voice was scarcely audible at first. Cautioned to speak louder, he composed himself by an effort and answered the preliminary queries as to age, occupation and intimacy with Hayes.

He told of meeting Hayes at the pier and driving him to his, the witness's, studio apartments. Early in the evening they had taken the witness's car and motored to Rhinehill to visit the Dustin home.

"Did your friend speculate as to how his grandfather would receive him?" asked Chapel.

"He made no definite statements," replied Ashley, his jaws squaring.

"He didn't express himself as anticipating trouble with Mr. Dustin?"

"No."

The press table unanimously decided the witness was lying.

"Do you know how he was situated financially?" Chapel's voice had a purring, almost a caressing, note now.

Ashley hesitated and then said:

"He needed funds. I offered to lend him money, but he refused."

"I see. Doubtless he preferred obtaining it from his grandfather. Please describe the meeting between the two." Chapel was now staring at the ceiling.

"I can not," Ashley replied in a low voice. "I didn't witness their meeting. I remained in my car."

Chapel jerked his head forward sharply and scrutinized the witness with a curious little smile twisting his thin lips.

"Miss Hayes testifies you entered the house," he gently reminded.

"A natural error on her part," the witness stubbornly returned. "She heard me offer to help John with his suitcase and bag and jumped to the conclusion that I entered the house. I accompanied him only to the door and then returned to the machine."

"Mr. Ashley, Miss Hayes was led to believe from her telephone conversation with you that you and Hayes were to pass the night in the Dustin home," coldly warned Chapel.

"That was our intention, but John lost some of his optimism as we arrived. He hated to ask his grandfather for money. If there were to be any lectures I preferred to keep out of it. I didn't care to witness any family rows."

"Then you did anticipate—even if Hayes failed to mention it—that there might be a 'family row'?" cried Chapel sternly.

Ashley's face flushed.

"I've known John Hayes for years. I've also known that Mr. Dustin didn't care for artists, or any class of men who didn't earn their living by obeying a whistle or an alarm clock. If everything was agreeable between him and John, I was to wait till John summoned me. If they had any high words, I intended to run back to town alone."

"Then you hadn't expected Hayes to go back with you?" This was flashed in like a knife thrust.

Ashley became more confused, and faltered—

"I had entertained that possibility in my mind."

"I see," very grimly. "What did Hayes say when he came out?"

"Hardly anything. Said his grandfather was in an ugly mood, but had 'warmed up' at the last. He believed it best to return to town with me. He refused to accompany me to my apartments, and asked me to let him alight when I reached the apartment building, saying he preferred to walk to a hotel. He gave no explanation for his actions. I did as he wished and we parted."

"Did you offer him any money?"

"Yes, when he spoke of a hotel. But he laughed and said he didn't need any."

"When did you next see him?"

"I've not seen nor heard from him since that last parting. I don't know where he is, nor why he keeps his identity concealed. But I do know," and his voice doubled in volume, "that he had no more to do with his grandfather's death than I did."

"That last is hardly necessary for the record," growled the Coroner. "Have you told everything?"

"So far as I can recollect, yes."

CHAPEL stooped behind the table and produced a black handbag of generous proportions, which he exhibited to the witness, demanding—

"Where have you seen this before?"

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Ashley's mouth opened stupidly and he mumbled—

"Why—er—it's John's bag!" Almost instantly he realized the importance of the admission and wildly charged, "Some one from your office has been sneaking into my apartments, sir."

"Exactly," dryly confessed Chapel, placing the bag on the table. "Perhaps you've noticed these stains on the handle. They resemble blood stains."

"They are blood stains," muttered the witness, licking his dry lips. "Hayes held the bag in his lap as he sat beside me. A few miles out of Rhinehill I came near running into a tree in taking a sharp curve. He jumped to his feet just as I jammed on the emergency brake.

"He was thrown against the glass windshield, breaking it and cutting the back of his fingers. The cuts were barely more than scratches, he assured me, and after wrapping his handkerchief about his hand we resumed the trip. That's how the blood got on the handle."

"And now would you please explain how the bag got into your apartments?" smiled Chapel.

"He asked me to keep it for him. He said he shouldn't need anything but his suitcase."

"You examined the contents of the bag?"

"Sir!" thundered Ashley, his face crimsoning with anger.

"Then you are not aware that it contained this?" And Chapel triumphantly produced and held up for the benefit of the Coroner and the press table a small vase, dark blue and gold in color, with *rocaille* handles.

Ashley's face twitched horribly as he glared at the vase.

"I—I never saw it before," he whispered.

Pursing his lips gravely, the Assistant District Attorney asked—

"Hayes told you nothing as to his plans?"

"He told me nothing," fluttered the white lips.

This ended the examination, and those reporters who had to catch early editions tiptoed from the room and raced for telephones. As Ashley was taking his seat Miss Hayes entered from the side room, and Chapel requested her to take the stand. Handing her the vase, he inquired—

"Being familiar with your grandfather's collection, can you identify this vase, Miss Hayes?"

She looked much surprised as she took it and examined it closely.

"I thought this was in the study at home," she murmured. "It's one of the pair of Chelsea vases grandfather prized so highly—a mate to the broken one."

"Have you discussed this case with any one—Mr. Ashley or Mr. Cromb, or any of your acquaintances?" asked Chapel, as she continued eying the vase in deep perplexity.

"I was taken ill directly after finding the body. I have talked with no one; haven't even read the papers," she reminded him.

"One more question. . Have you found your grandfather's will?"

"I have not. I searched; then I 'phoned his lawyer. Mr. Titcomb is abroad. His clerk said the will was delivered to Mr. Dustin."

"So you don't know the terms of the will?"

"Hardly." And she frowned at the vase.

She was excused without learning what every one else in the room knew—that the vase was taken from her brother's luggage and was not the one in the study at home. Throughout the exhibition of the vase Cromb's features had betrayed deep amazement, and he leaned far forward in his chair, staring incredulously.

"Mary Falow!" summoned the Coroner.

She was the domestic in the Dustin home, a thin, frightened-appearing girl. Without much prompting she gave her evidence in hurried, jerky sentences.

"I have worked in the Dustin home for about two years. On the night of the—killing—I stayed up to lock the front door, as I didn't know Miss Ruth was up. James Backus, the man of all work, usually looks after the doors, but he was away that night.

"I was at the head of the stairs, looking down into the reception hall. There was no light in the reception hall, but one was burning very low in the vestibule. It didn't light the hall hardly any, as the vestibule door was nearly closed. What little fed in lighted the end of the first living-room faintly. It lighted it more'n it did the hall.

"As I stood in the upper hall Mr. John came in. I thought some one came in with him. He set something down by the foot of the stairs. I didn't see him enter from the vestibule, for when I looked he was in the

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hall with the vestibule door nearly closed behind him. He was just setting something down when I saw him. It was like seeing a shadow, so dusky was the hall.

"He entered the library. As he opened the door I saw the light shining on his face. The door closed almost instantly, and I started to go down and lock the front door. Then I heard Mr. Dustin's voice, talking angry and excited. I heard him say something about his will, and then the words, 'You won't get a penny.'

"Mr. John said something I couldn't catch, as his voice was lower. But I did catch the words, 'You've called me a loafer. I'll show you.' I ran back upstairs, not wishing to hear them quarreling.

"When I looked down again Mr. John was in the hall at the foot of the stairs. He stooped over something, then straightened and walked back towards the library. He didn't open the door, but suddenly returned towards the stairs. I thought he was coming up, and I didn't want him to think I'd been listening, so I left the head of the stairs and walked down the hall by Miss Ruth's room.

"After a few minutes I heard a door close and returned to the head of the stairs. It was quiet in the library, and I went down into the hall to lock the door. But as I got to the foot of the stairs I heard a swish of skirts in the living-room and in the pale shaft of light from the vestibule caught a glimpse of Miss Ruth's face. Knowing she was up, I didn't wait to lock the door, but went to bed."

"Did you recognize Hayes when you saw him in the reception hall?" eagerly asked Chapel.

"I saw his face when he went into the library. All other times I could only make out his form, as it was quite dark below."

"You're sure it was he each time?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did it surprise you to see Miss Hayes?" inquired the Coroner.

The maid hesitated, then replied:

"If I'd known she was up I should have gone to bed. But I wasn't surprised to see her. I knew she'd talked with Mr. Ashley. When I saw her I knew she wanted to speak to him as well as her brother. I didn't want to be in the way."

Miss Hayes colored vividly as the domestic told this, and Ashley frowned fiercely. The press table added another paragraph to the running story. The Coroner beckoned the Assistant District Attorney to him and the two whispered earnestly for some minutes. As they finished their conference the Coroner announced—

"This inquest stands adjourned till further notice."

But the reporters knew some one had escaped immediate arrest only by the narrowest of margins.

CHAPTER II

THE MISSING SUITCASE

(Narrated from here on by Jethuel, Mr. Butterworth's assistant)

I NEVER saw my chief, Ezra Stackpole Butterworth, in better spirits than when he returned from the Dustin inquest. Calling me into his private office he announced:

"At last, Jethuel, the Bureau of Abnormal Litigation has found a case worthy of its efforts. I feel twenty years younger. It looks very promising."

"Most promising for young Hayes' arrest and conviction, once he's found, sir," I ventured; for I had been following the matter very closely in the newspapers. "Also most promising for Ashley's arrest as accessory."

"It's very interesting," insisted Mr. Butterworth, conning his notebook, which was well filled with his crabbed handwriting. "It's amusing how the Coroner and the District Attorney's office gloat over an unexplained bit of evidence, never seeming to realize it's up to the prosecution to clear the atmosphere. When young Ashley called on me two days ago I couldn't decide whether or not to accept his retainer. But now that the Chelsea vases are involved I'd be tempted to look after his interests for nothing, rather than to miss it."

"The very fact he came to you so early in the game and sought your services would look bad before a jury," I reminded. For long experience in criminal work had taught me that innocent men are very indifferent about alibis and eminent counsel, taking it for granted their guiltlessness must be obvious to all. Again, I was surprised at Ashley's coming to us, as I've supposed these artist chaps are usually unpractical. He's an exception, however, and has plenty of money.

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The Chief ignored my last remark, and after pondering thoughtfully directed—

"Find the suitcase young Hayes must have left checked in some hotel or railroad waiting-room. I want it found at once."

Although used to his abrupt ways, I couldn't help asking—

"Why do you think it's waiting to be found?"

He began to be impatient, then shifted to his kindly manner, and chid:

"Tut, tut, Jethuel. A man disappears after leaving a handbag with a friend. He effectually disappears; which means a change of name and appearance. He refused to confide to his nearest friend and drops his identity completely.

"Detectives on both sides of the water are eager to pick him up, but he's vanished. He didn't pause to choose any of his belongings from the bag. Nor would he need the suitcase beyond a certain point.

"Why did he go to the hotel instead of to his friend's apartments? Because he wanted to be alone when he made the change that wiped out John Hayes. He retained the suitcase to hold his ordinary clothing after he had provided himself with a new outfit.

"A minute description of him has been wired all over this country and Europe. No one satisfying the description has been found. I would suggest you first visit those hotels within easy walking-distance of Ashley's apartments and learn what guests arrived about two o'clock in the morning of the day of the homicide.

"Then see if you can find a suitcase wihch was left in the check room early in the forenoon. Get the description of it from Ashley."

It was seldom the Chief gave me such lengthy directions, and it evidenced his unusually high spirits. I lost no time in getting to the hotel district adjacent to Ashley's rooms. I gained the confidence of one strange clerk and renewed friendships with two old ones, and inspected the lists of guests arriving in the morning of the fourteenth very carefully without obtaining what I believed to be a clue.

I didn't care to investigate the check rooms till I was sure of my man, as once my true purpose was known the management would probably notify the District Attorney's office or the Coroner and the authorities would be after me hot-foot. It was while walking away from the third hotel that I caught a glimpse of Dunbar, one of the District Attorney's best shadowers, trailing me. I respected Dunbar and his nosing ways very highly. We had met before.

Sliding into a telephone booth I connected with the Chief and informed him:

"The D. A.'s man is on the job. He's following me."

By his abrupt directions I could tell he was annoyed. He said:

"Meet me at Ashley's studio. I'm afraid you've bungled a bit. Some one must have informed the D. A. Be careful not to bring your friend Dunbar with you."

This put me on my mettle. For the next thirty minutes I gave Dunbar the time of his life and at last gained Thirty-ninth Street, confident I had lost him. After loitering for a few minutes I saw Mr. Butterworth's white hair bobbing up and down in the hurrying crowd. Falling in beside him I briefly explained what I had done. Beyond grunting he made no comment on my efforts, except to say:

"While I'm talking with Ashley you might look about the rooms a bit. Artists' studios are often very interesting places."

We found Ashley in an awful funk. When we rapped I heard something tip over. When his startled face confronted us at the door I looked over his shoulder and saw an easel on the floor. The man's nerves were shot to pieces. Even Mr. Butterworth's cheery greeting failed to restore his composure.

"Anything new?" inquired the Chief, taking a seat near the window and motioning the artist to sit near him.

"Not that I know of, but there will be soon," groaned Ashley, placing a shaky finger on a newspaper item. The heading was in red and promised—

EARLY ARREST TO BE MADE IN THE DUSTIN CASE

Then twisting the paper convulsively, he cried:

"I almost wish they'd come and have it over with. Prison can't be worse than this suspense."

"Don't lose your courage," soothed Mr. Butterworth, beaming appreciatively at the pictures on the walls. "My! What a beautiful likeness of Miss Hayes! I never knew you did portraits."

"See here, Mr. Butterworth, this infernal mix-up is driving me crazy," moaned Ashley. "There was the bag and vase—in my

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possession. What'll they dig up next? Detectives have been to the garage to inspect my car. They found the wind-shield broken, as I testified; but they'll say I smashed it to explain away the blood! The asses! If I wanted to explain away the blood I could have destroyed the bag. Say, do you believe me when I say I hadn't any idea that —— vase was in the bag?"

"Most certainly," cried Mr. Butterworth, rising to get the proper light on a marine. "Ah, this is hardly worthy of you, Ashley," he next sighed, pointing at the picture. "You have an alarming variety of colors but absolutely no harmony of tones." And as he gesticulated I caught the corner of his eye and read therein a command. I began an investigation of the rooms.

After disappearing behind a large square of canvas I cast about in earnest. I poked behind lumber and dusty furniture, and looked through a wardrobe and two closets, but found nothing beyond the general miscellany one might expect in a studio.

Next I explored an alcove room, used for sleeping-quarters. It was small and empty of all furniture except the bed, a chair and a dresser. It was somewhat disagreeable to rummage through the man's furnishings, especially when I had no adequate idea of what I was seeking. The various drawers revealed nothing but haberdashery, and I was about to quit the room when my attention was held by the bed.

According to my domestic instincts it didn't seem to be made up just right. There was something too prominent about the pillows. With one step I was beside it and had removed the pillows. Beneath were the sheets and mattress, only the latter seemed to be unduly elevated. I lifted up an end and there, extending crosswise, was a suitcase. I picked it up and carried it out to the Chief.

"Ah, what have we here, Jethuel?" he blandly greeted, readjusting his spectacles; while Ashley, his face distorted with fear and rage, gathered himself together to spring upon me.

"I believe it's young Hayes' suitcase," I said, preparing to meet an assault.

BEFORE Ashley could carry out any bellicose intentions a confusion of footsteps and voices sounded from the hall, quickly followed by a peremptory rap on the door.

With incredible quickness the Chief seized the suitcase and stood it on end. Then he placed a square box of paint tubes on top of it and with almost the same motion snatched up a small art square and draped it over the case. The whole maneuver was done as quickly as one—two—three, and by the time the second summons sounded on the door he was seated on what might have been a high stool, and was saying—

"I think I hear some one at the door, Mr. Ashley."

The artist, white of face and tottering of step, was in no condition to meet new guests, and taking my cue from the Chief I turned the lock. It was Dunbar.

"You know what I'm after," he announced. And, turning, he called out down the hall. Two men, strangers to me, came running.

"If you're after Ashley you've no need to bring a crowd," I smiled.

"Bother Ashley," he sniffed. "I want that suitcase some of you people withdrew from the checking-room of the Hotel Randal."

And he eyed Mr. Butterworth's amused face suspiciously. The Hotel Randal was one of the hostelries visited by me.

"Thumbs down, Dunbar," I grinned. Incidentally, the last time I had bucked up against the fellow he had defeated me most outrageously.

"If the District Attorney desires any article supposed to be in the custody of Mr. Ashley, my client, I should advise you to search the premises and discover it for yourselves," smiled Mr. Butterworth. "Of course, you haven't any authority to search this studio, but undoubtedly Mr. Ashley will overlook your ill manners and give his consent."

Turning to the window to conceal his emotion, the artist gruffly invited:

"Go as far as you like, only be quick about it. I know nothing about any suitcase. Maybe the District Attorney has planted one here; he seems able to find almost anything else."

The bitterness of his tone caused Dunbar to waver in his suspicions, and I knew he entered upon his task with no particular zest. For good measure I kept close at his side, indulging in quips and lightsome remarks until he forcefully wished me in the place never patronized by honest lawyers. He

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inspected the rooms very thoroughly, entering one small sleeping-room I had not seen. When he gave it up, sour of face, he growled:

"Just wait a bit, Master Jethuel. I'll put one over on you yet."

"Copy cat," I laughed.

"Oh, I know you've got it," he growled. "But there's another day coming."

With which trite observation he departed, closely followed by his two henchmen.

When sure they were clear of the hall, Mr. Butterworth inquired—

"How did you get this, Ashley?"

"The day after the killing I received the check from Hayes. It wasn't signed, but I knew his handwriting. He simply requested me to get the case and keep it till he returned. But things had transpired so threateningly that I didn't dare make a move till recently."

"The D. A. seems ready to prove you're the man who got it from the Randal, and that puts you in a lot deeper," growled the Chief.

"Prove nothing," sneered Ashley. "He can't."

"Why?" exploded the Chief.

"Because he can't. I'm not at liberty to say any more," curtly returned Ashley.

The Chief's face was very stern for a few moments. Then the ire in his gaze changed to speculation, and I could see the artist's attitude interested him. That meant it refreshed and pleased him. He always loved a situation that defied immediate solution.

With his wonted cordiality he removed the art square and prepared to open the suitcase. Before doing so, however, he announced—

"I shall be surprised if I don't find all the clothing worn by Hayes the last time you saw him." Then he lifted the cover and dumped out the contents.

"Good Heavens! His clothes! Can it be he's dead—suicide?" choked Ashley, shivering like a gray-birch leaf.

"Not unless he committed sucide in his bare skin," dryly assured the Chief. "He simply shifted his clothing when he shifted his name to disappear."

"Oh, this is too horrible!" groaned Ashley, wringing his hands. "Think of his poor sister! Poor little Ruth!"

"You still refuse to tell how you got this case?" demanded Mr. Butterworth.

"I do, most emphatically," retorted Ashley. "How I got it has nothing to do with my predicament." Then, in terrible anxiety, "Tell me; do you believe John innocent?"

"I'm in an excellent position to know, with you refusing to give me legitimate information!" Mr. Butterworth charged coldly. "Your question shows you have your doubts. But remember this: many people are asking the same question about *you* that you've just put about your friend."

"I'm innocent," mumbled Ashley. "Beyond temporary disgrace no harm can come to me."

"I'd like the complexion of your affairs better if Miss Hayes hadn't testified that you entered the house with her brother," informed the Chief.

"She was mistaken," he softly replied. "I did not enter the house."

"Very well," murmured the Chief, closing the suitcase. "I take it for granted you speak the truth when you say the District Attorney has no proof that you obtained this piece of baggage."

"He has no proof," Ashley assured him. "The suitcase was never at the Randal. That was merely one of the detective's bluffs. Don't ask me anything more about it. My lips are sealed."

"Take the thing to the office, Jethuel," ordered Mr. Butterworth. "I find my client is obstinate and it's necessary for me to do a bit of work."

I remonstrated and begged him to allow me to undertake the task, whatever it might be; but he said:

"It requires a great deal of finesse, Jethuel. Any one could ask questions enough to learn the truth; but in this instance the truth must be learned without any one else even guessing it."

Quitting the building, I boldly carried the suitcase to our office, passing several detectives and policemen, with never a person suspecting I was toting the baggage of the suspect in the Dustin case. It amused me especially when I met one of the *Tribune* boys, a favorite reporter of mine, and paused and allowed him to pump me as to our connection with the homicide.

It was some two hours later, I remember, when the Chief walked buoyantly into the office and in great glee informed me:

"I know who got the suitcase. The boy in charge of the check room hasn't any suspicion he's given me any information."

"If it wasn't Ashley it must have been a messenger boy," I hazarded.

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He smiled pityingly. "Why should Ashley be so anxious to shield a messenger? No, no. It was a woman."

"A woman!" I exploded.

"Softly. It's a secret. I want you to go to her home at once. It was Miss Hayes."

CHAPTER III

JETHUEL STEALS SOME EVIDENCE

MY INSTRUCTIONS were simple even to terseness. I was to interview Miss Hayes and ask her certain questions, after assuring her that only the truth could aid Ashley. Of course this might place the poor girl in an awful dilemma; for while it was apparent she and the artist entertained a deep affection for each other, there remained the problem of her brother. She could hardly be expected to make any admissions which would incriminate him.

With the community of interests interlocking so closely, it was difficult to separate truth from falsehood, and I expected Miss Hayes to tell me falsehoods unhesitatingly if she believed them to be the agency for saving her brother. What young woman, similarly placed, worthy of the name of sister, wouldn't lie up hill and down dale? Long experience had taught me that untruths are not always immoral. I've heard them told by women when I believed they ennobled the sex.

In the ordinary sense I was somewhat hardened, but I never could steel myself to see women and children suffer. So I felt guilty when I rang the bell of the Dustin house a little after eight that evening and asked the shrinking domestic, Mary Falow, to take my card to Miss Hayes.

A few minutes' wait in the reception hall and she descended the stairs, her face suffused with excitement. While my coming had been unannounced, I did not suppose it would cause her any deep emotion. To my way of thinking she was almost feverish in the intensity of her bearing.

I found myself deciding she was controlling herself by a mighty effort while expecting and fearing something would happen. She even gave me the impression of hearing my explanation with only half her ears, with her attention keyed high to catch some alarm.

As we had met at the inquest, I had no call to introduce myself. She knew I was from the Bureau and that Mr. Butterworth had been retained by Ashley. Notwithstanding this affiliation with the artist's interests, she was not pleased to see me.

"If you'll please be brief," she began in a monotonous voice, avoiding my gaze. "I'm very busy—that is, I wish to be alone."

I seated myself and averred:

"I won't keep you but a moment, if you'll kindly answer my questions. As my office represents Mr. Ashley you can feel assured we are in no way inimical to you or yours. My employer wishes to know why you procured the suitcase for Mr. Ashley."

She had remained standing till now. As I concluded she slumped into a chair, her small hands clenched convulsively.

"He told you that?" she asked.

"No, we found it out," I replied. "He refused to tell us anything, although his secretiveness prejudices his own standing."

And I hastily narrated how the Chief had barely managed to prevent Dunbar from finding the suitcase in the studio, thereby saving Ashley from being incriminated further.

She reflected a moment, and then demanded—

"How did Mr. Butterworth come to believe I got the suitcase from the hotel?"

"One of his guesses," I answered. She drew a deep breath of relief; but I added: "One of his guesses which crystallized into a certainty. He visited several hotels within a narrow radius of the Ashley studio and inquired in each if a young lady, his daughter—giving a description of you—had recently removed her suitcase from the checking-room. After three trials he found a check boy who recognized the description and assured him that his daughter had procured such a piece of baggage.

"Much gratified to discover he had a daughter old enough to undertake such an errand, my employer retired, informed me, and sent me up here. Now he's anxious to learn why the District Attorney's man should suspect that Mr. Ashley had the suitcase, and why Mr. Ashley should have permitted you to go on such an errand."

"Mr. Ashley knew nothing about it," she finally admitted. "I received the message from my brother. The name of the hotel was on the check. It was at the Imperial. He simply asked me to tell Mr. Ashley and

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have him get it. Instead of doing so I went for it in person. I brought it here and kept it overnight. Early in the morning I rode to town and took it to the studio. Mr. Ashley had planned to drop it into the river."

"Did either of the servants see you bring it in?"

"No. I entered by the side door and left it locked in the study."

I checked off that particular query and answer and continued:

"Mr. Butterworth desires you to state how you failed to see your brother in the hall when you were in the living-room. Will you tell me?"

She gave a sharp little cry and evaded:

"Why should he think I saw my brother?"

The poor girl! I pitied her. She made mighty awkward work of it. Her eyes and cheeks alone shrieked the truth aloud, even while her lips were clumsily telling the lie.

"The maid saw you immediately after your brother went out. You could not have been in the living-room without seeing your brother. It was no ordinary occasion, Miss Hayes. You wanted to see him, to welcome him and talk with him. To be near enough to the vestibule door to be recognized immediately after your brother departed means you saw him."

"Oh, why must you lawyers make one miserable by prying and digging into one's affairs?" she moaned, resting her head on her hand.

"We're your friends," I reminded her. "We're engaged to defend Ashley."

"But you're not employed to defend my poor brother," she passionately retorted.

"Nothing you tell us will be used against your brother," I promised.

"Then I did see him," she hurriedly confessed. "But I did not speak to him. I saw him when he stooped over something near the foot of the stairs. I think it was his bag he picked up. I was about to speak when he began ascending the stairs. I couldn't understand why he should go upstairs and leave Mr. Ashley alone in the study——"

With a low cry of horror she broke off and sobbed bitterly.

Her grief alarmed me; and, anxious to soothe her, I protested:

"But Ashley wasn't in the house. You were mistaken. He did not enter with your brother."

SHE ceased her weeping, but continued to eye me wildly. She was incredulous of my assertion. She had feared right along that the prosecution would convince a jury of twelve men that the artist connived at the old man's death. She was holding something back, something that all my efforts to assuage could not overcome.

Therefore it must be something, I argued, that was based on the evidence of her senses. View the tragedy from any angle and it was fated to be horrible for her. Both her lover and her brother were involved.

"I heard them walk up the steps and gain the door," she muttered.

"But you didn't hear Ashley enter the house," I insisted. "He returned to the auto to await the outcome of the interview between your brother and your grandfather. He says it, and we believe him."

With rigid, incredulous face she heard me out and then asked—

"What else would you learn?"

"Mr. Butterworth wants to know if you've found the will."

The question sent her nerves off into another jangle, and it was some few seconds before she answered in the negative.

"Do you know the contents of the will?"

"The lawyer who drew it is away—in Europe," she replied. Her eyes asked a hundred questions as she sought to deduce my purpose in putting the query.

"The prosecution will contend your brother took the will. Do you know where it is?" I bluntly urged.

She plucked nervously at her gown, her gaze averted as she considered some problem. Finally she seemed to have made up her mind, and meeting my eyes unflinchingly she returned:

"At this time I refuse to tell you anything about the will. I will say that my brother did not take it."

"You've already said you know nothing about it," I reminded her.

"No will has been produced as yet," she slowly answered. "I refuse to state at this time whether I have it or not."

This was discouraging with a vengeance.

"The prosecution will allege that your brother destroyed it because it disinherited him," I further essayed.

"Let them say it!" she quickly defied. "And what if I say I destroyed it?"

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"That would be equivalent to a confession that your brother was disinherited and that you destroyed it to shield him."

Her eyes seemed to flame as I finished this obstacle, but she was equal to it.

"What if I say the terms of the will were obnoxious to me personally?" she countered. "What if I swear that my grandfather left me a fortune on the condition that I marry his old friend, Mr. Cromb? It's known that my grandfather frowned on my preference for Mr. Ashley. Would the jury believe me if I said I destroyed the will to save my half of the estate without marrying a man I could never love?"

"I would, if I were on the jury," I said with great enthusiasm.

For the first time I saw her smile. It was a small, pitiable smile, but it illumined her pale face most gloriously and evidenced how charmingly wholesome she must be when restored to a normal plane of living. The smile was but a flash, however, for in the next instant her face became overcast and she inclined her body as if listening. Rising abruptly she said:

"I must retire. Good night."

There was something in her manner that aroused my suspicions. She had turned her gaze toward the library door several times while making her last remark, and I felt impelled to inquire:

"Are you alone here tonight, Miss Hayes? Is Ashley in this house?"

"Ashley here? Good heavens, no!" She shivered. "There is no one here but the cook, the maid and myself, and possibly the man, Backus."

"Has any servant the right to enter the study or library in the evening?" I persisted.

"They could enter if necessary, but none does except the maid in the morning," she faltered, moving toward the stairs.

"Then I must do you a service," I cried, springing across the room. "There is some one in there now." And I seized the knob of the study door. Instantly she was at my side, her hands clutching my arm as she tried to drag me back.

I had expected to find the door locked, but to my great surprise it opened readily. I pushed her aside. The man standing in the middle of the room, his startled face turned toward me, was Nathan Cromb.

He appeared to be dumfounded, nor was the girl lacking in symptoms of great agitation. None of us spoke at first. Finally I asked—

"Is Mr. Cromb here with your knowledge, Miss Hayes?"

"I am," broke in Cromb before she could answer. "I am here at her request."

"Mr. Cromb is always welcome here," she slowly affirmed.

"Might I ask the nature of his business here?" I persevered, for I believed the girl was telling an untruth when she said he was welcome.

"I'm looking for something—a clue," he sullenly replied. Then in a burst of resentment: "What right have you to question me? I'm here at Miss Hayes' request. Are you?"

"I understood she was alone with the servants. I believed I had caught a burglar," I returned, ignoring the insolence of his question.

"Yes, yes. He's here at my request. I gave him the key," she nervously asserted.

"Then he came by the side door," I mused.

"What of it?" demanded Cromb, his features settling into an ugly expression.

"Nothing, except the Coroner believes there was only one key to the side door," I said.

"I've told you I had a key," Miss Hayes faintly reminded me. "I don't think my grandfather knew it. But I had one." Stepping quickly to my side she whispered, "I used it in bringing the bag in here."

Cromb's face was unpleasant to see as she excluded him from her confidence. Not only did he resent it, but it puzzled him. I devoutly wished the Chief could have been there to inventory the situation. So far as I could make out every step we took carried us deeper into a muddle. But of one thing I was positive; the girl was afraid of Cromb and eager to retain his good will. He might be there with her knowledge, but never at her request. Wishing to learn something definite, I asked—

"What clue are you looking for, Mr. Cromb?"

He hesitated and gave Miss Hayes a searching look. To my surprise he quietly replied—

"I'm looking for the Dustin will."

I must have displayed some surprise, for he said gloomily:

"I'm an interested party. I've known Mr. Dustin for years. He trusted me. I've

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often been commissioned to buy articles for his collection. He as much as told me he had remembered me in his will with a substantial legacy. It must be somewhere in the house."

As he talked I wondered if there was a possibility that the girl had told me the truth after all, when she hinted that she might have the instrument in her possession. I knew I was becoming hopelessly befuddled; and as she was now mutely pleading with me to withdraw and relieve the situation, I bowed to Cromb and observed:

"I find I'm mistaken, and will say good night. The mere fact that both of us, Mr. Cromb, are actuated by the desire to serve Miss Hayes should be sufficient to eliminate any hard feeling over this chance meeting. The will should be found by all means."

He shrugged his shoulders and withdrew to a window, waiting for me to go. I paused to look about the room and observe the various objects of art, rather few to my way of thinking for a collector to boast of. Miss Hayes read my thoughts, and in a low voice explained:

"These are only a portion of the antiques. Others are loaned to the museum and others are stored upstairs. In the library—" and she stepped through the archway—"are some of the choice things in the collection. This is the *bisque de Sèvres* group, Fragonard's '*Fontaine d'Amour*,' you know!"

I didn't know, but endeavored to look wise.

As she continued, giving rambling descriptions of various beautiful or hideous antiques, I knew she was talking to give Cromb an opportunity to withdraw, but my first glance on entering the library told me he would remain for a while. This line of reasoning was based on no shrewd deductions, but simply because of the fact that the man's hat rested on a chair on our side of the archway. What attracted my attention to it, however, was a long, slender object wrapped in paper and lying across it. He was to take it with him when he departed.

I can attribute my impulse to appropriate the object only to some rare instinct, that personal equation that gets at the roots of things without bothering to explain the wherefore to our slow objective faculties. Indifferent to the incentive, I picked up the article and found it hard beneath the paper.

I ran it up my sleeve till the end rested under my shoulder. Then I excused myself and withdrew. As I passed into the reception hall I saw Cromb standing stiffly before a shelf of silver *bênitiers*, evidently waiting for me to go. Miss Hayes seemed relieved when she could say good night and close the door.

AS I STROLLED back to the hotel I had much to reflect on. In the first place, I wondered what Ashley would say and how he would feel could he call at the Dustin home and find Cromb prowling about the study. Then the thing in my sleeve reminded me that I was uncomfortable, and I gingerly transferred it to my pocket.

The hotel depended for the bulk of its patronage on the passing automobile traffic, and on this evening had but few guests. I had a large, airy room on the first floor over the office, and lost no time in mounting the broad stairs to examine my loot.

As I halted before my door and felt for the key I was startled to hear some one moving about inside. It was early evening and the hall was brilliantly lighted. What was more, my room was also illuminated, evidencing that the intruder was taking scant pains to conceal his presence. Holding the purloined article in my left hand I gently tried the knob. The door gave readily, and I entered.

"Don't shoot," cried a hearty voice, and my Chief left a small table and advanced to greet me. "Took a notion to come up after you," he explained. "I got to thinking about that will. We ought to find it. Mine's the next room. I came through the connecting door, which you obligingly left unlocked."

It was his way; he would send me on an errand and then turn up before I could complete it. I can recall some rare instances, such as the Hingham forgery cases, where he arrived ahead of me and had the work all done by the time I put in an appearance.

"If it's the will you're after you'd better go over to the Dustin house now," I advised. "Will-hunting seems to be quite a fad." And I gave my experiences in detail.

"Is the girl telling the truth?" he asked.

"She isn't telling anything," I insisted. "She merely hints she may have the will, or has destroyed it for the reasons I've cited."

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He rubbed his nose thoughtfully and remarked:

"Perhaps we'd better let them get through hunting. If any of them find it we'll be saved that much trouble." Observing the article in my hand, he inquired, "Been buying a candy cane?"

"I stole it from the library," I grinned. "It was on Cromb's hat. He had planned to take it home with him. Perhaps he came for it rather than for the will." I spoke in jest, little realizing I had unearthed an important truth.

"Let's have a look," said Mr. Butterworth curiously, rubbing his hands in brisk anticipation.

I unrolled the paper wrappers. Within was a bronze spear, about two and a half feet tall, with a long, slender head of the same metal. The staff was the size of my little finger, while the blade was narrower than my thumb.

"What d'ye know about that?" I babbled, utterly at loss to explain the toy.

With a sucking intake of the breath, Mr. Butterworth stepped to the door and locked it and then hung my cap on the knob so as to cover the keyhole. Next he drew down the shades tightly and passed into his room and made fast the door leading into the hall. Even then he wasn't content, for he closed the door leading into his room.

"Better cover the transom over the connecting door," I joked, inclined to make light of all these precautions.

Ignoring my banter, he took the spear close to a wall light, produced his pocket magnifying-glass and stared earnestly at the slender blade.

"The game gets exciting, Jethuel," he softly remarked, as he replaced the glass and leaned back, staring at the bronze toy.

"Meaning this thing adds to the excitement?" I asked.

"I consider it one of the most important clues yet discovered, undoubtedly ranking second in importance. I send you on a haphazard errand, and behold—to drop into the talk of the street—you bring back the goods. Yes, Jethuel, this little spear ranks next in importance to the broken vase!"

"Great Scott, sir!" I cried. "If I'm a hero, please explain so I can compliment myself."

For I was beginning to feel exasperation at his slowness, plus resentment at my own stupidity in not being able to solve the value of my chance theft.

"This is the mortal weapon which killed Jacob Dustin," he quietly informed me.

"The deuce it is!" I gasped.

"I haven't the slightest doubt of it," he earnestly assured me.

"But why?" I cried.

"Because no other weapon has been found. Because the blade corresponds to the size of the wound. Most important of all, because the glass reveals spots which I unhesitatingly pronounce to be blood," he triumphantly replied.

Seating myself on the edge of the bed, I surveyed the spear blankly and found it very sinister and evil, rather than a toy. "How does the finding of it help our case—Ashley's case?" I inquired.

"That's for us to study out," he absentmindedly retorted, already losing himself as he concentrated his mind on the deadly little rod. "We have a puzzle picture to put together, and this is one of the most important sections—only it doesn't fit in just yet. But what an asinine move for Cromb to remove it from the study!"

"What is his motive?" I eagerly asked.

"Doubtless to aid the girl; who knows?" muttered the Chief. "But its absence is sure to be noted, and she will be in a worse predicament than ever. Unable to explain, she would be compelled to tell of Cromb's visits and the second key, nor would that explanation clarify the situation. Let me see——"

He whipped out his watch and pondered deeply. Then he wrapped up the spear and walked to the door, saying:

"I'm taking this back where it belongs. Don't sit up for me if you feel like retiring. Leave the connecting door unlocked, and if I have anything of importance I'll arouse you. I'm glad you brought it over for me to examine, Jethuel. It was very thoughtful of you."

CHAPTER IV

AS HOST AND GUEST

THE moment I opened my eyes I knew some one was in the room. There was no sound to alarm me, no light by which I could recognize the intruder. Had it been Mr. Butterworth he would have awakened me at once. No, it wasn't the Chief; yet some one was near me, and his

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presence had routed me from sleep.

For a count of ten I remained quiet, seeking to locate the fellow. The room was deathly quiet till the faintest suggestion of a movement near the dresser gave me a clue. I reached for the light at the head of my bed, but before I could switch it on there was a faint click, and my end of the room was flooded with noonday radiance from an electric flashlight.

I must have presented quite a tableau to the man back of the light, for I held my pose for nearly a minute, or, rather, till my outstretched arm began to ache. Of course I could see nothing of the man, not even when he advanced close to the bed; for the powerful light raised an impenetrable barrier between him and me.

"I suspected you were awake," remarked an emotionless voice. "You changed your style of breathing."

"To counterfeit sleep is the hardest of all tasks," I reminded him. "I suppose you are armed?"

"I have a revolver. I don't think I shall have to use it. Turn on the light."

I complied and the flash was shut off. It was Cromb. Already he had shifted his attention from me to my traveling-bag, the contents of which were scattered about the floor. Somehow his whole bearing suggested dejection rather than desperation.

I swung my feet to the floor and pulled the blankets about me Indian fashion and watched him admiringly. Usually a burglar pays some heed to his victim; he displayed no interest in me whatever. It impressed me as being one of the rawest bits of nerve I had ever witnessed. His face, to cap the climax, was petulant when he finally addressed me:

"Where is it?"

"Where's what?"

"The article you stole from the Dustin library last evening."

"So it's after midnight, eh? You refer to the bronze spear?"

"Of course. Let's not fence about it."

This very impatiently, and he sent his brooding gaze prowling about the room. "I've taken the liberty to look through your things, also the bureau drawers; but it doesn't seem to be here."

"I'm glad you made yourself at home," I observed. "If I'd known you were coming I would have made lemonade or bought some candy."

This bit of irony glanced off; in fact, I don't think he heard it. Dropping the flashlight into his pocket, he sank into a chair and scowled heavily. I waited.

When he spoke there was a new ring to his voice; he had made up his mind to a definite course of action and was not to be swerved from it. Slowly producing a revolver from an inside pocket—a most unlikely place to pack a gun—he carefully dropped it in line with my head.

"You're going to do what I request, or Rhinehill will be startled by another homicide," he began.

I inventoried his smoldering, dark eyes and drawn face thoughtfully. I knew I was going to be very complaisant. When one is caught in his night gear and forced to gaze into the muzzle of a revolver he is easily influenced to accede to any reasonable request.

I was not afraid, as I knew I stood in no danger so long as I gracefully allowed him to have his own way. Positive that his coming was connected with the Dustin case, I began to be very curious to learn the true import of his raid.

"Please don't begin shooting till I've had a chance to convenience you," I said.

"I shall surely shoot if you refuse," he gritted, thrusting his head forward. "I'm not used to firearms. I may make a mistake. Where's the spear? I want it *now*."

"It isn't here," I earnestly declared, my left side developing an area that felt icy cold.

His face became infuriated, and he hoarsely cried:

"Not here? Good Heavens! What have you done with it?"

"Just a minute," I insisted. "It's where it should be; where it can do no harm."

"You've destroyed it?" he eagerly demanded, lowering his gun.

"Nothing so idiotic," I corrected. "It's back in the Dustin library. What was your idea in taking it?"

"You know my motive," he growled, again raising the revolver. "I went there purposely to remove it. You cursed lawyers think only of your one client. You know what it means for Miss Hayes if that spear is found."

That his words surprised me is expressing it but mildly. My expression must have convinced him of my sincerity, for he relinquished his tension and his gaze wavered a trifle as he continued:

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"You're hired to defend Ashley. While you're doing that a better man is being hunted down for murder. Not only is John Hayes involved, but his sister will be before this thing is worked out if you lawyers keep on stirring up the mud.

"Good Heavens, man, isn't it possible for a lawyer to be human? Are you compelled to turn against every one, sacrifice every one, just because some one man slips you a fee? Can't you see what you're doing to Miss Hayes?"

"I know you're talking a lot of rot," I angrily replied. "You ought to know, if you have any brains at all, that the last thing we would do would be to injure Miss Hayes. Incidentally, it's the last thing our client would permit." He winced at this. "The Dustin homicide will not be allowed to drop. It refuses to remain quiescent. It's a bad mess and some one must suffer.

"Innocent people will suffer because of their affiliations or relationship to the guilty person. The spear you so foolishly planned to destroy would not only create rank suspicion against Miss Hayes, but would be the most damning bit of evidence against *you*—once it was discovered you had taken it."

He collapsed, and his features twisted up with an awful fear.

"Involve me?" he whispered.

"Very seriously," I declared. "You couldn't explain why you took it unless you confessed you wished to divert suspicion from some member of the Dustin household. That in itself would be a damning admission. Even then the authorities might not believe you, and they would be curious to learn how you knew the spear was the mortal weapon, how you came to be nosing round the library.

"Their questions would be very embarrassing. If it wasn't known who removed the spear Miss Hayes would be accused. The conclusion resulting from that suspicion would convict her of attempting to shield her brother—or herself."

"Good Heavens!" choked Cromb, now completely subdued. The revolver slipped from his limp hand to the floor.

"GET the gun, Jethuel!" barked a voice behind us.

I instinctively obeyed, snatching up the weapon before Cromb could collect his senses. Then I took time to turn about and behold Mr. Butterworth standing in the doorway of his room, a small automatic in his right hand.

"You don't mind if I join the party?" he queried. Cromb stared at him stupidly, but did not seem interested in my possession of the revolver. As the Chief advanced his facial expression was unusually genial.

"I've been eavesdropping," he confessed. "I watched proceedings through the transom at first, so I'm posted on your private conversation. I must say I admire the motive that actuates Mr. Cromb—his great desire that no innocent person shall suffer for the murder."

Cromb shivered and gritted his teeth, his gaze growing glassy as he watched the Chief. Mr. Butterworth continued:

"To ease his mind completely I'll state that the bronze spear has been returned by me to the library. I paid my respects to Miss Hayes, briefly inspected the two rooms, and, unobserved by her, restored the spear to its rightful owner, the Norse warrior, who now carries it over his shoulder as he disembarks from his bronze boat."

"The bronze statuette," I murmured.

"Quite right," smiled the Chief, rubbing his hands gleefully. "I hardly think any one will notice the blood on the blade, as Mr. Cromb cleaned it quite thoroughly."

"But I did not," earnestly broke in Cromb. "It's just as I found it. I knew a microscopic examination would reveal blood, as the spots are visible to the naked eye."

"Some one cleaned it," mused the Chief, walking to his room and back, his brows deeply puckered. His voice was very stern as he paused and said:

"Listen, Mr. Cromb. Don't remove anything from the library or study. Don't visit those two rooms again till I've been there and looked the premises over. I don't relish the way you're concerning yourself in trifling with material evidence. It looks bad—bad for you.

"The spear is where it should be. It may not be noticed, but had you made away with it the prosecution would have detected at once that it was missing. Then there would follow a fine hue and cry, a new line of theories, and Miss Hayes would have been charged with making away with evidence that implicated her brother.

"Keep your hands off, sir. We lawyers may stir up the mud, as you've expressed

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it; but if there's truth at the bottom of the mire we're going to find it."

Cromb arose and bowed abjectly. He had lost all power of initiative. He walked to the door and would have passed into the hall without speaking, had not Mr. Butterworth directed—

"Give the gentleman his revolver, Jethuel."

As he mechanically slipped the weapon into his coat pocket he turned to the Chief and fiercely demanded—

"You think your client is innocent?"

"Why, certainly," replied the Chief. But his gaze narrowed.

Cromb laughed harshly and asked—

"If you knew Mr. Dustin threatened to cut the girl off without a penny if she married this artist, would you still hold he had no motive?"

"Money's no object to Mr. Ashley. He's rich in his own right," Mr. Butterworth reminded him.

"What if you knew he left the house *after* young Hayes left it?" whispered Cromb, his face twitching nervously and dots of sweat shining on his forehead.

I saw the Chief gather himself as if standing up against a shock, but he was outwardly composed as he retorted—

"He wasn't in the house that night."

"The girl says he was," said Cromb. "What if he was seen to enter and was seen to leave *after* John Hayes departed?"

I knew the Chief was worried, although his bearing was calm and confident.

"If you know all this," he said coolly, "I should say you're holding back most vital evidence. Shall I inform the District Attorney you possess this knowledge?"

"I've made no declarations," grimly replied Cromb. "I've merely suggested things."

"You've suggested too much or too little," said the Chief.

"Suppose we say no more about it just now," said Cromb. "I'm glad the spear is back in place. I confess I bungled in disturbing it, but I meant well. Good night, or rather good morning." And, bowing, he slipped from the room.

"Jethuel, that chap is a queer, cool card," remarked Mr. Butterworth. "I must go over his hints and dissect them carefully. I'm very glad he called. I heard him when he entered. You're a very heavy sleeper. Good morning."

I WAS up early despite my interrupted night's rest, expecting to catch a train to town. But when Mr. Butterworth joined me at the breakfast table he announced that we both would visit the Dustin home and examine the library and study.

Miss Hayes received us in rather a listless manner, and on learning our errand ushered us into the library and pulled back the draperies between that room and the study. Mr. Butterworth first opened the door at the end of the study and briefly examined the small hall. This hall terminated in three steps, which led down to the outside door. Having satisfied himself as to this exit, he returned to the study and proceeded to the business in hand—a minute scrutiny of the room.

"The District Attorney's office has the fragments of the broken vase, I suppose?" was his first query.

"Yes, they were gathered up at the Coroner's orders," she replied. "That is, all except a few pieces the maid found when sweeping up some fine powder after the Coroner had finished with the rooms."

"What did she do with them?" eagerly asked Mr. Butterworth.

"I'm not sure. I was badly upset. I think she emptied them into the waste-paper basket in the library."

She had scarcely finished before the Chief was through the archway and kneeling by the desk, impatiently directing me to bring him a large piece of paper. I found a newspaper in the magazine rack, and he spread it on the rug and then poured out the contents of the basket.

I noticed many small particles of plaster-like substance and traces of fine dust. The Chief carefully separated all he could of this on a small piece of paper. As he continued his search, lifting bit after bit of paper most carefully, I knew he had not found what he was looking for.

"I understood you to say there were several fragments——" he began in a querulous voice, but broke off with a low cry of satisfaction. He had found a small piece of the broken vase, having a circular edge. This was carefully placed aside; and further search yielded three more pieces, two smaller and one larger than the first fragment.

Removing the paper to the top of the desk he produced his pocket-glass and

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studied them long and intently. I knew by the twitching of his lips that he was finding some values. Finally he turned to Miss Hayes and asked—

"You identified the vase shown you in court as one of the Chelsea vases belonging to the Dustin collection?"

"It was one of a pair he purchased at an excessive price. The vases had no duplicates. My poor mind has been much confused since the inquest. When I left here that morning the undamaged vase was in the study. It was shown me at the inquest. Yet when I got home it was here again."

"Haven't you read the papers?" curiously asked Mr. Butterworth.

"Not since the first day." She shuddered.

"Please examine this largest fragment carefully," he requested, passing the glass to her.

She did as desired, and after the first quick scrutiny I noted her fingers were trembling.

"You see it?" asked Mr. Butterworth.

"It's a counterfeit," she whispered. "The lines left by the edge of the mold haven't been removed."

"That is true," he quietly agreed. "What would be your grandfather's emotion on discovering that one of his little treasures was not genuine?"

"He would be exceedingly angry," she quickly returned. Then decisively: "But the two Chelsea vases he owned were genuine. I dusted them shortly before he—died. I don't understand—it's all so mixed up."

And her voice trailed off till it threatened to break down in hysteria.

The Chief soothed and comforted as best he could, and diverted her by suggesting that we look at the collection in the study.

She led the way, first pointing out a group of grotesque animals of Franco-Celestial as well as purely Chinese imagination—genuine antiques from the reign of William and Mary, when the mania for collecting Oriental china in hideous forms was at its height.

The little monsters were beautifully mounted on chased rococo ormolu bases. Mr. Butterworth, by instinct and observation something of a connoisseur in art, experienced genuine satisfaction in studying the leering monkeys, the impossible dogs and cats, and other extravagant forms. His voice was careless as he inquired—

"These curios are all genuine, I suppose?"

"Why, certainly," she retorted, sweeping the line with a keen glance. "You didn't expect to find more forgeries, did you?"

"So much deception practised these days, I shouldn't be tremendously surprised," he murmured, passing on to pause before a Worcester tea caddy.

"This is surely genuine."

A Henry III medallion next held his attention for several minutes. He examined it carefully, and then appealed to her expert knowledge with one inquiring glance.

She caught the unvoiced query and sighed:

"Genuine. My grandfather was an expert. It would be almost impossible to deceive him."

I could see she wearied of the inspection and would feel relieved when we left.

"A Louis XV lacquer inkstand, with ormolu and saxe mounts," he exclaimed as he halted before the next antique. He handled it gingerly and extended it for her verdict. She received it indifferently, perhaps with a touch of annoyance at his persistent expectation to discover more frauds. But as she held it she gave a smothered little cry.

"Well?" he triumphantly demanded.

"Genuine," she faintly replied.

He bowed gravely, relieved her of it and passed on to some Battersea enamels. A moment of silent scrutiny, and he shifted his gaze to several black-crayon studies by François Boucher. One look, and he was inspecting a shelf of Delft pottery.

But his interest in the collection had evaporated—I could tell that by the frequent glances he cast toward the library. Quitting the pottery, he abruptly returned to the library and asked Miss Hayes to point out where the fragments of the vase had been found. She silently indicated the space before the table. A dark stain on the rug evidenced where the old collector had fallen after receiving his death wound.

Mr. Butterworth became very curious about the table, and even knelt and lightly passed his fingers over the edge of the lower shelf. As he withdrew his hand I saw that the fingers bore traces of a whitish dust, He looked at the powder through his glass. and briefly informed us—

"Came from the smashed counterfeit."

"If you'll excuse me, I'll retire to the hall till you've finished. I feel unequal to re-

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maining in here any longer," Miss Hayes tremulously broke in.

"My dear young lady, please pardon an old man for being so thoughtless. Retire by all means," apologized Mr. Butterworth, opening the door for her and bowing with his old-fashioned courtesy.

He returned immediately to the shelf under the table and asked me to note that it was smaller than the surface of the table by the thickness of the legs, to the inside corners of which it was made fast. Without bothering to enlighten me as to what significance this fact had for him, he carefully removed several books and pamphlets and found quite a few crumbs of the shattered vase. These he placed in an envelope for future reference and examination.

As he rose and dusted his hands I suggested—

"If we're through with the basket I'll return the papers."

"One more look," he said, anticipating me by beginning to drop the odds and ends in the basket bit by bit. He had nearly completed the task when his back stiffened, and without rising from his knees he held up for my inspection a narrow slip of paper containing the typewritten numerals:

5.50
4.75
20.00
10.00
4.00
12.41
25.00
6.00
1.77
2.25
500.00
591.68

Tucking the paper into his pocket, he announced—

"One or two questions to Miss Hayes, and we'll be going."

WE FOUND her in the reception hall and a glance at her eyes told me she had been weeping. The Chief had a very gentle, soothing way with women, and as I stood back he bowed over her and talked in a low voice. She seemed to brighten a bit under the influence of his words, and lifting her eyes stared earnestly into his honest old face. She must have seen something there that comforted her, for she impulsively gave him her hand.

"You can really tell me to hope for both?" I heard her murmur.

"Yes. Life wouldn't be worth living if not for hope," he answered. "No matter what we have to endure, remember it's only for today. Tomorrow is always glorious with possibilities."

Then, in his office voice: "Before we go I want you to tell me truthfully if your grandfather's will has been found. It's for the good of all concerned that I know the truth."

"It has not," she replied in a troubled voice.

"Was any money found either in the library or in the study after his death?"

"No. He never kept money on hand in the house. He checked for everything on the local bank."

"Was his check book found?"

"It's in the desk."

"May I see it?"

She readily fetched it and at his request read off the last ten checks. The list began with one not contained on the typewritten slip and ended at "$2.25. Milk."

He took the book from her hand and examined the stubs rapidly. I was watching over his shoulder. There was no check for five hundred dollars. Returning the book and thanking her, we departed.

On the way to the hotel we stopped at the bank, the president of which was an acquaintance of Mr. Butterworth's. After shaking hands, my employer inquired if Mr. Dustin had drawn out five hundred dollars within a short time prior to his death.

"I can answer yes without looking the matter up," informed the banker. "I joked him because he'd forgotten his check book and had to use one from the shelf. I remember he took the money in fifty ten-dollar bills."

"This was when?" inquired Mr. Butterworth.

"Two or three days before his death," sighed the banker. "I can fix it exactly by looking on the books. But I know he requested that his balance be sent him, and that was mailed the day before he was killed."

"Thank you, Hiram. I'll consider it a favor if you say nothing about this unless asked by the authorities. In good time I'll see it's properly mentioned."

"I know I shall be doing right in obliging you, Ezra," heartily assented the banker.

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CHAPTER V

FACTS THAT BEWILDERED

REVIEWING the affair, back once more in the offices of the Bureau, to me it was all confusion. I could see the puzzling bits of evidence all right, but when it came to classifying them and making anything coherent out of the mess I was helpless. My employer, as was his wont in stubborn cases, seemed to thrive on each added enigma, repeating:

"It's a puzzle picture, Jethuel. We find it difficult to put it together and learn just what it's all about, but the more pieces we have to work with the more simple the task becomes. When we get them all, or nearly all, the problem is solved.

"When a boy, I used to put cardboard animals together. I remember the zebra and tiger always bothered me till I found the piece showing the tip of the tiger's tail. That one clue made all the rest easy."

"It probably will clear up in time," I conceded, "but the District Attorney is making no bones of his theory. To him it's already clear. He's right down to brass tacks, too, and is ready to go before a jury tomorrow if he only had young Hayes in custody.

"He knows Hayes wasn't on the best of terms with his grandfather, his habits of roaming causing the old gentleman much annoyance. Mr. Dustin disliked Ashley, as he considered him an idler. Naturally he objected to any union between the artist and Miss Ruth.

"Both young men went to the house knowing they were unwelcome. Young Hayes was returning home, strapped. Miss Hayes to the contrary, I believe Ashley remained in the machine while his friend was inside. Miss Hayes simply jumps at a conclusion when she says the artist entered the house. The District Attorney will be just as well pleased if it's shown she is mistaken, for that would clinch the contention that Ashley expected his friend to ride to a fall.

"The prosecution next argues that Hayes was turned down by his grandfather when he asked for funds. What is more important, and as testified to by the domestic, he threatened to cut him off without a penny. The D. A. probably will insist that Hayes's retort, 'You've called me a loafer; I'll show you,' was a threat of bodily harm to the old man.

"They had the 'family row' dreaded by Ashley. Hayes knew he was up against it. In some way he knew there were five hundred dollars in the library. The old gentleman worked himself into a rare rage.

"Young Hayes is hot-blooded. His grandfather strikes at him viciously with the Chelsea vase, and Hayes throws the bronze Norseman at him, or strikes him with it, and the spear severs the jugular and kills him.

"He is in a terrible predicament. He must have money before he can efface himself. He overhauls the desk drawer and finds the fifty ten-dollar bills and also finds the will. He knows the Chelsea vase is valuable and he drops it into his bag and escapes to the auto.

"He doesn't want to involve his friend and is strangely silent. He leaves the bag with Ashley, but refuses the shelter of his rooms, saying he has money enough. Prior to visiting the Dustin home he didn't have money enough. But he has now and goes to a hotel, taking his suitcase with him. Early in the morning he procures a new outfit, stuffs his clothing into the suitcase and checks it. Then he vanishes. This is what the D. A. intends to put across."

The Chief nodded approvingly, but reminded me—

"You haven't provided for the counterfeit vase."

This staggered me for a moment; then I placed myself in the District Attorney's shoes and amended:

"The D. A. can logically contend Hayes knew nothing about any specified sum of money in the house when he went there to raise funds. Knowing his grandfather's habit of paying everything by check, he had but little hopes of finding ready money. So he prepared himself to make a raise by stealing something from the collection.

"Not having murder in mind, and unwilling that his grandfather should connect him with the fraud, he took the counterfeit along, intending to exchange it for the original. Perhaps Mr. Dustin caught him in the act, and that's what precipitated the row. Yes; as I think of it, that would sound reasonable to a jury. For the vase was found in his bag."

"Very concisely put, Jethuel," applauded the Chief. "Now, to direct your powerful mind to our own affairs, suppose we sum up some of the interesting points.

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"In the first place, the will is missing. With it destroyed, the two grandchildren share the estate equally. It's been vaguely suggested by Miss Hayes that the missing instrument provides that she marry Cromb to inherit, he being the trusted employé and companion of her grandfather. It's also suggested that the will may cut her off if she marries the artist.

"This gives us two motives, theoretically, why she should take and destroy the instrument. It is true that Mr. Dustin's lawyer is abroad, but there was nothing to prevent the testator from informing her of his wishes and the contents of the will.

"According to the domestic, the old gentleman threatened to disinherit the grandson. Motive for grandson to steal the will. If Ashley were a money grabber he would have a motive for taking the will, provided he believed it prohibited his marriage to Miss Hayes.

"Besides the will, there's five hundred dollars missing. And lastly, John Hayes, suspected of committing the murder, is missing."

"The District Attorney's office wants to speak with you," interrupted the stenographer from the door. Mr. Butterworth picked up the receiver and listened intently. Then he said:

"It's all bosh. I'm ashamed of you for suspecting it, Chapel. I can't work up any indignation, it's so asinine. I regret it as much as you do." Replacing the receiver, he gazed thoughtfully at the desk for several moments before speaking. Then he calmly resumed—

"I will now add to my inventory of interesting points in the case by announcing that Mary Falow, the Dustin domestic, is also among the missing."

"Great Scott!" I cried. "How's that?"

"Chapel went up to interrogate her and found she's disappeared. She quit the Dustin house some time last night. His office is hunting high and low for her, and he was childish enough to suspect we might have secreted her. Bah!"

"If this keeps up, sir, there won't be anything left of the case," I cried. "Everything seems to be missing or disappearing."

"Well, well, let's proceed with the inventory," he said. "Ashley, our client, hasn't told all he knows. He's holding back something important. His motive can only be—providing he's innocent—to protect his friend. Miss Hayes hasn't told all she might. She's holding back something that she believes would incriminate some one. Cromb could tell much more. Now that the Falow woman has disappeared I fear she has been a bit reticent. What motives are keeping them silent?"

"Neither Ashley nor Miss Hayes will say anything to incriminate young Hayes, you've already stated," I observed. "I agree with you."

"Nor will the artist or Miss Hayes say anything that might incriminate the artist," supplied Mr. Butterworth.

"But our man's innocent," I protested.

"No one need be innocent when we inventory theories," he corrected.

"Passing to Cromb, he puzzles me," I continued. "I'm convinced he's in love with Miss Hayes."

"And therefore would shield her or her brother, but would be pleased if his rival should be forced out of the game," the Chief supplied.

"Then he might be tempted to color facts to make it hard for Ashley," I added.

"Why not? Hasn't he as good as said Ashley left the house after young Hayes departed? How should he know if he wasn't at the house that night? Is he relying on some one else's say-so? Or is he lying, and was in or about the house despite his assertion to the contrary? If he claims to know Ashley was in the house we must believe he's telling a lie, for we believe that Ashley was in the machine. Miss Hayes thinks he entered the house, but bases her belief solely on the fact that she heard him mount the steps."

"WHAT is Miss Hayes holding back?"

"I suspect several things; one I'm positive of. You recall the Louis XV inkstand—the one she pronounced to be genuine? It's a forgery."

"Impossible!" I exclaimed.

"But yes," he smiled. "I'm not exactly an amateur in such matters. That fact rather spikes any theory that young Hayes armed himself with a counterfeit, planning to steal a vase. For who faked the inkstand? Hayes surely had no widespread plans for wholesale theft from the collection. Besides, he's hardly up to the technical part of the game.

"But to leave that for a bit, let's consider

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the dust I found on the lower shelf of the library table. It came from the shattered vase. Doesn't it strike you as most peculiar that the vase should be so thoroughly smashed as to reduce portions of it to powder? It couldn't have resulted if it was accidentally dropped, or knocked from the table, or even if thrown against a man's head or body.

"But we can be more precise, and determine fairly accurately the course of the vase when it fell or was thrown. The lower shelf is considerably smaller than the surface of the table. If the vase was dislodged from the table, and even if it fell in a perpendicular line, it would miss the edge of the bottom shelf by some four inches.

"But there are dents in the smooth surface of the lower shelf which were made recently. The dents mark where the vase hit. In other words, it was hurled violently and passionately under the table. There was no burglar under the table, for the lower shelf is within a foot of the floor. I believe we can safely contend that Mr. Dustin threw the vase from him after discovering it was a counterfeit."

"I pass for the present," I admitted weakly.

"Well, I don't," grimly declared Mr. Butterworth. "The whole case pivots on the fake vase."

"If we could only find Hayes!" I lamented.

He snapped me up:

"Hayes? I only hope he'll keep out of the way till this snarl is untangled. The one person to find now is Mary Falow. That's your job, young man."

While I was promising to do my utmost the stenographer intruded for the second time, announcing, "The District Attorney's office wants to talk with Mr. Butterworth."

As the Chief listened I saw him start and frown impatiently. Gradually his face cleared, and he heartily said:

"All right, Chapel. Much obliged. It's very decent of you."

"Well, it's happened," he whimsically informed me, tilting back in his chair. "Before looking up the domestic you must go to the District Attorney's office and arrange bail for Ashley. Yes, he's been arrested on the Coroner's order and held for the Grand Jury. The Coroner decided to close the inquest with what evidence he had at hand. Chapel is really quite shrewd. He knew the inquest, if continued, would furnish us with additional knowledge of what the D. A. has up his sleeve."

"But will they consent to bail?" I incredulously asked.

"It was Chapel who proposed it. Said bail wouldn't be considered once an indictment was found, but that it could be arranged pending the Grand Jury investigation. But Chapel isn't actuated by any desire to please me or convenience Ashley. He's after Hayes. He's pushing the case against Ashley so he can use him as a decoy. With Ashley arrested but released on heavy bail he hopes the artist will either betray his friend's hiding-place or that Hayes, on reading of the arrest, will come forward and surrender."

Before I could depart on this errand an insistent voice, loudly arguing in the outer office, attracted my attention. Opening the door to relieve the stenographer of her unwelcome task, I beheld Backus, the man of all work at the Dustin home. He was much excited and rapidly losing his temper.

Beholding me, he forgot the girl and eagerly cried:

"Let me in to talk with you and Mr. Butterworth. I've come all the way from Rhinehill to see you. I'm fetching a message from Miss Ruth."

I motioned him to enter, and the moment I closed the door he had produced a slip of paper.

"From Miss Ruth, sir. She told me to hand it to no one but you."

It was stale news to us, consisting of the announcement:

> The servant girl, Mary Falow, disappeared last evening some time. She left part of her belongings and failed to ask for her pay. I thought you ought to know.

"Thank you, Backus," said Mr. Butterworth. "And here's a dollar to buy smokes or drinks with."

Backus stolidly shook his head and refused.

"I don't want the money; thank you just the same, sir. You can help me another way. For if Miss Ruth hadn't sent me with the note I should have come just the same. I'm worried about Mary Falow, sir. She's been 'bout crazy over this crime, and I'm afraid she may have gone crazy in earnest. Good Lord! She may have killed herself!"

He was deeply disturbed and his eyes, as

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he turned first on me and then on my employer, were filled with appeal.

"What I wanted to ask, sir, was if you didn't have some way of finding her. I've heard you lawyers are mighty keen on finding people."

"We'll try, Backus," promised Mr. Butterworth. "Thank Miss Hayes for me."

I left with Backus, quitting him on the street after he had urged me anew to do my best to locate the missing domestic.

ASHLEY had not been lodged in jail, but was under guard in the outer room of the District Attorney's office. When I entered I was startled by his pallid face. It resembled soiled note paper in color, and I feared he was about to collapse.

"Brace up," I encouraged. "It's no worse now than it was yesterday. I'll have the bail arranged at once."

"I'm not worrying about that," he mumbled. "But when we get clear of this cursed place there's something important I want to tell."

"For Heaven's sake keep shut till we do get out," I warned him under my breath.

Calling up some office friends on the telephone, I soon arranged for bondsmen, and finding a judge in chambers soon had the bail fixed at ten thousand dollars. As we were leaving the building Ashley tried to talk, but I would hear nothing till we were safe in the privacy of Mr. Butterworth's office. After ushering him to the Chief's presence I explained he had "something to tell."

"It's high time, Ashley," the Chief coldly informed him. "But tell me nothing except the truth. What is it?"

"It's this," panted Ashley. "The bag found in my room—the bag John gave me to keep for him—isn't John's bag!"

In all my experience in the Bureau I have seldom seen Mr. Butterworth confounded. Now he appeared to be stupefied. I know my lower jaw felt as if it were flapping loosely. After making his amazing statement Ashley puffed for breath and, leaning half out of his chair, glared wildly at the Chief.

"Let's get this thing straight," slowly began Mr. Butterworth, softly tapping his fingers on the desk. "Do you mean it isn't the bag he usually carries, or that it isn't the bag he carried to Rhinehill the night you drove him there in your car?"

"It isn't the bag he carried to Rhinehill," cried Ashley.

"That is a most astonishing declaration," muttered the Chief. "If it's true, it mixes my puzzle picture all up again. What's your reason for saying that?"

"John Hayes knew Europe like a book," rapidly replied Ashley. "It was always a matter of jest with him that American tourists in particular should permit hotels to cover their baggage with labels. He styled tourists who submitted to this practise as being 'sandwich men for some of the worst hotels on earth.' If ever a hotel employé pasted labels on his baggage he would raise the roof till they were washed off. As a result no one ever saw any labels on his traps, no matter where he traveled.

"When I met him at the pier and took him to my rooms in the car I noticed a small, diamond-shaped label on the bottom of his black bag. I joked him about it. He grinned sheepishly and said it was stuck on at a small hostelry in the Swiss Alps, and being on the bottom he hadn't noticed it for several days. He had tried to scrape it off with his knife, but succeeded only in cutting the leather. Then he decided to let it stay, using it as a mark of identification. He turned the bag up and I noticed the label closely. One corner had been dug off where he had used the knife. Several chunks of leather were also missing. It would be impossible to remove the label and cover up the mutilations."

"Excellent!" loudly declared Mr. Butterworth, banging the desk with his fist. "You will make a detective, Ashley. The bag in the D. A.'s possession?"

"The bottom of it is as smooth as my face," earnestly asserted the artist. "After I was taken to the office they led me to a table and sprang some of the exhibits on me. Perhaps they expected me to lose my nerve and betray myself in some way.

"Chapel picked up the bag and asked why I didn't open it while it was in my possession; also why the vase didn't get broken when Hayes fell through the wind shield. As he was turning it about I happened to notice the bottom. I thought at first they'd washed off the label, and it surprised me, as that would be tampering with the evidence. Then I managed to get a close look at it. It isn't John's bag."

My Chief rose and warmly shook the

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artist by the hand, impressively declaring, "Mr. Ashley, your discovery is the most important in this case, possibly barring two."

"It helps you?" gladly asked Ashley, his face flushing with pleasure.

"It will help us immensely."

"How do you rank it with the other evidence?" I quizzed.

"I still place the Chelsea vase first," he slowly replied. "Yes, I'll amend my first statement. I'll place the bag next to the vase and above the mortal weapon. Jethuel, go to Rhinehill as soon as possible and look up the domestic. Mr. Ashley, how would you like to do a bit of detective work for the Bureau?"

"I'd be mighty glad to do it," eagerly answered the artist.

"Good! Jethuel, visit the District Attorney's office and ask to see the bag. Let them know Ashley informed you they were incredulous as to the bag being driven through the wind shield for the reason that the vase was unbroken.

"Examine it enough to learn the manufacturer's name. It should be on a leather tab, attached to the upper part of the lining. If they weren't so cocksure it belongs to young Hayes they would have traced it long ago. Turn the information over to Mr. Ashley, and he'll do the rest. Then proceed without any delay to Rhinehill."

CHAPTER VI

THE EXTRAVAGANCE OF MARY

IT WAS an easy task to get the name of the firm that manufactured the black bag—the concern was located in Rochester, N. Y.; and, passing the information on to the artist, I departed for Rhinehill.

I decided that Miss Hayes was more cheerful than when I saw her last, although she knew about Ashley's arrest and release on bail. I expressed my desire to learn all I could about the domestic's strange leave-taking.

She told me the maid had complained of a headache early in the evening and had asked permission to retire. As she went upstairs Miss Hayes noticed that her eyes were red as if she had been weeping, and in this connection added regretfully:

"I should have spoken to her and comforted her a bit, for I fear it was something worse than a headache that worried Mary. But I've had all I could do to meet my own trouble."

"How long has she worked here?"

"About two years."

"Ever notice anything peculiar about her, or have any trouble with her, or because of her?"

"No—nothing she was to blame for. There was a time, some six months ago, when I was inclined to be provoked with her; but she was in no way to blame."

As this sounded a bit ambiguous, I requested her to explain it. She continued:

"I had just returned from a two-weeks' trip to Philadelphia and one of my neighbors told me Mary had been wearing my gowns and hats. She said she had seen her on several occasions, usually at dusk, wearing some of my clothing.

"I was on the point of calling the girl to account when I remembered that it would require considerable effort on her part to get at my wardrobe. I was hardly ready to credit Mary with any unwholesome persistence, and before accusing her I investigated. My dresses and hats had not been disturbed. I was very glad I didn't unjustly offend her."

"The neighbor was mistaken?"

"Of course. As to Mary's going away, I know practically nothing. The cook, who has the room on the ground floor off the kitchen, says she fell asleep in her chair last night while reading the paper. She thinks it was about ten o'clock when something aroused her.

"The door into the hall was ajar, but the hall was unlighted. Some light, however, streamed into the hall from her room, and she thinks she saw some one pass her door. She would be more worthy of belief if she wasn't so peculiarly insistent that she caught a glimpse of a hand holding a black bag. She must have dreamed it."

"Why shouldn't you credit her statement?" I curiously asked, my nerves tingling as vague possibilities began suggesting themselves.

"Because there isn't a black bag in the house. My grandfather had several russet-colored bags and I have one of the same color. But there's no black bag here."

"Maybe she had a russet bag and it looked black," I suggested.

She shook her head.

"She owned no bag," she said, "and none

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other is missing. The cook was mistaken. Very likely she heard Mary when she went out the back door. But she saw nothing."

"Could I inspect her room?"

She led the way up the stairs and through to the back hall. Mary's room was off this. We stepped inside and before I could put the query Miss Hayes answered it by saying:

"Nothing has been disturbed. The bed was not slept in last night." Then, opening the closet door, she pointed to several neat but cheap dresses and said: "The poor girl's wardrobe. Only her raincoat and black felt hat are missing."

I examined the dresser carefully, but beyond a few hairpins and bits of ribbon found nothing. The drawers of the dresser were empty. A small shelf of books in one corner held my attention for several minutes, however, and I memorized some of the titles to report to the Chief. The books were all fiction of the hysterical, impossible order, dealing with "Young Geraldine's Lover," and the like.

I quickly glanced through two or three well thumbed volumes to satisfy myself as to the nature of their contents. They were all of the housemaid brand of stories, reveling in young lords who fell in love with poor girls and were ever loyal to them. Nothing harmful or nasty, yet likely to put strange notions into credulous heads.

"Interested in poor Mary's library?" murmured Miss Hayes with a sad little smile. "I tried to interest her in other books, but she seemed unable to enjoy anything except this kind. Once she said to me: 'Miss Ruth, I've slaved all my life. When I read a story I want all sorts of good things to happen to a girl in a bunch.' She was something of a philosopher, you see."

Leaving the shelf I pointed at a small trunk and inquired—

"What's in it?"

She raised her brows in surprise, and shrugging her shoulders replied—

"How should I know?"

"I desire to open it and learn," I said.

"It would hardly be right to tamper with the poor girl's petty belongings," she scornfully reminded me. "No, we'll not open it."

"For all you know, Miss Hayes, the missing will may be in that trunk," I said.

She gave a sharp exclamation and in a low-pitched voice demanded—

"You don't mean that?"

I was somewhat ashamed as I apologized:

"No; I didn't mean it. But I do mean this: the minute the District Attorney gets the idea he'll cart that trunk away, or go through it on the spot. This is no time to be conventionally polite. I do not expect to find anything of interest, but the girl has disappeared and we mustn't miss any opportunity."

"But don't you understand that the poor girl went away because she's overcome by the horror of my grandfather's death?" she protested, beginning to show impatience. "What earthly advantage would it be to you—to any of us—to have a complete inventory of all of Mary's belongings?"

"I desire to go through the trunk," I blandly persisted. "Please remember our Bureau is doing its best to save Mr. Ashley from very serious consequences."

My mention of Ashley had a deep effect upon her, and in a low voice she capitulated.

"I appreciate what you're trying to do. If the trunk is unlocked you may open it. You'll find nothing to interest you."

In an instant I was kneeling before it. It was locked. Before she could change her mind and offer any objections I had procured a wire hairpin from the dresser and was using a modicum of the skill I've so often found useful. The trunk was a cheap little affair, and my first essay was successful.

LIFTING the lid, I stepped aside; and as Miss Hayes, in spite of her pretended unconcern, leaned forward and gazed into it she exclaimed aloud in amazement. On the top of the tray was a hat. While no judge of a woman's headgear, I knew it cost more than any domestic's wages would sanction.

"One of yours?" I quickly inquired.

She lifted it carefully and smiled forlornly.

"Hardly one of mine; a bit garish," she replied. "Poor Mary! She had the desire but not the taste. I never saw it before."

"How much would such a hat cost?"

She twirled it about meditatively and decided.

"At least twenty-five or thirty dollars."

"And her wages?"

"Four dollars a week."

"Six week's pay for one hat," I mused. Then I removed a piece of sheeting and disclosed to view a dress, as riotous in color

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scheme as the hat, so far as I could judge.

"Well, I never!" gasped Miss Hayes, now making no scruples of removing it and examining it critically. "Where did she get that? No, it isn't one of mine. Still, it's correctly made and is in good style. The taste in color harmony is atrocious, yet it's what I'd expect Mary to select had she the money."

"She must have had the money, or else she stole the dress," I remarked. "How much did it cost?"

"Sixty dollars, for a guess. She does no sewing; is wofully incompetent with a needle. Where did she get the money? We've missed none."

I offered no suggestions, but removed the tray. Here we found another dress, of a darker pattern and less pictorial than the first. With it was a Panama hat, which must have cost some twenty dollars. This second gown, like the first, was far beyond Mary's legitimate means. Miss Hayes was frankly troubled. She said nothing, but stared at the dress as if she were almost afraid of it.

"Now for the bottom," I murmured, removing the second tray. We now found shoes—not such as Mary would wear about the house or was ever known by her mistress to wear on the street, but shoes that ranged in cost from five to fifteen dollars a pair. Besides the shoes was a pair of three-strap sandals, dainty, delicate things, suitable only in an elegant environment. They were as much out of place in Mary's life as were the young lords in her fiction, or as a pearl necklace would be about her neck when she was dusting the furniture.

"It seems, Miss Hayes, there was a chapter in Mary's life you never dreamed of," I said.

"I don't understand it," she murmured. "She never had any callers. She never visited any one. She never expressed a desire to be absent from the house overnight. She never received or wrote letters.

"I can only explain it by attributing the things to her ambition. I must blame her ill chosen fiction for that ambition. Yes, she had a side to her life I never suspected. She worked as a domestic, but there were moments when she lived a make-believe life. It must have been one of those dresses and hats that led my neighbor to believe the girl was wearing my clothes."

"I can understand her love for these things. I can see how her line of reading impelled her to buy them," I said. "But for the life of me I don't see where she got the price."

"It's perplexing. Suppose we put them back," sighed Miss Hayes.

I was about to do so and had arranged the shoes in order when my fingers lingered on a long, narrow box, wound 'round with a piece of tape. I picked it up and although conscious of Miss Hayes's disapproval unfastened the tape.

"I should prefer we didn't examine her little trinkets," she was beginning to protest, when I removed the cover.

"John's!" she ejaculated; then she clapped her hand to her mouth.

The box contained a fountain pen curiously encircled with bands of gold. It was equipped with a clip made of platinum, the first I had ever seen.

"Your brother's?" I gently asked, holding it out to be further identified.

She thrust her hands behind her and retreated as if it were something deadly, muttering:

"No, no. Put it up. I don't know whose it is. Put it back. Come away."

I held the pen to the light, and on one of the diagonal gold bands read the two words, daintily etched—

JOHN HAYES

"Just a moment." I detained her as she hastened to leave the room. "Shall I replace this in the trunk, where the District Attorney may find it, or shall I take it with me?"

She leaned against the door-casing, all life gone from her face, and in a piteous voice said:

"Take it with you—please. I never knew it was there."

As I placed it in my pocket I recalled her previous statement that Mary never wrote or received letters.

After descending to the reception hall I obtained something of the domestic's history. It was soon told. She came from England to live with a cousin in New York. Almost coincident with her arrival her relative died and she entered the service of Mr. Dustin, being hired through an agency. So far as Miss Hayes knew she had no relatives on either side of the water. Nor was it known that she ever formed an acquaint-

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ance among the hired help of Rhinehill. From all I gathered she kept much to herself.

"And now she's gone there's absolutely no place I can think of that she may have gone to," concluded Miss Hayes.

"Your man Backus, in delivering your note, expressed a fear she might have been overcome by the tragedy and had lost her reason, and possibly had made way with herself," I informed her.

She drew her breath sharply at the suggestion of suicide, but shrewdly observed—

"Hardly as serious as that, seeing she bothered to take her raincoat."

I acknowledged the sense of this and reverted to the bag. Miss Hayes was not to be shaken on this point, however. She was positive the maid had never owned any sort of a traveling-bag, let alone a black one.

"She might have kept it in her trunk?" I persisted.

"Why should she?" she naturally countered. But she seemed to consider my remark as a challenge, and asked me to return to the maid's room. Leaving me for a moment, she returned with a russet-colored bag and asked me to put it in the trunk. I found it impossible to do so unless I removed the trays.

"Of course, I couldn't swear she didn't keep it in the trunk and kept the trays under the bed," she said. "But I don't believe it. And why should she hide it? What makes you think she must have owned a traveling-bag? Why is it material? Why?"

I answered vaguely and prepared to depart, but she was unwilling for me to leave until I had told her of Ashley. I rehearsed the details of his arrest and admission to bail for the second time, but said nothing as to his trip to Rochester to trace the black bag. After I'd finished I decided to risk unnerving her, and suddenly demanded:

"Miss Hayes, tell me honestly. Whom do you suspect of having the will?"

My question was unexpected, and distressed her.

"I can't tell you whom I suspect," she said. "I do suspect, but I don't dare say more."

"Is it Cromb?" I ventured.

She turned from me, and her voice was pathetic as she begged:

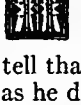
"Don't ask me any more questions. I don't want to lie to you. But don't ask me anything else."

I mulled over her strange behavior all the way to the hotel, but it didn't ring right. It didn't fit in with my estimate of Cromb. I had no doubt but that he was eager to wed the heiress. If he had the will it was to his interest to produce it; for under its terms he was undoubtedly a beneficiary.

Nor had I believed the gentleman's statement in the library to the effect he was searching for the will. He went there that night to remove the bronze spear. If the will contained any of the provisions suggested by Miss Hayes in our first interview it was decidedly to Cromb's advantage to present it.

Of course, there was the remote possibility of his playing a very subtle game to work on the gratitude of Miss Hayes. If the will provided that the girl must marry him or forfeit her share of the estate he must know she could not be coerced into giving up the artist. But if Ashley were convicted of complicity in the crime, or was disgraced to the extent of being eliminated from the situation, then a master of finesse, I could understand, might win the girl's thankfulness by withholding the instrument; and because of his apparent readiness to sacrifice his own inheritance, might ultimately succeed in winning her high esteem and hand, if not her love.

And yet this last theory didn't jibe with my opinion of Cromb. Frankly, I didn't like the man; although in justice to him I'll admit his every move thus far had seemed to be intended to protect the girl.



MR. BUTTERWORTH seemed pleased when informed over the wire of what I had learned. I could tell that much by the little purr in his voice as he directed:

"See Miss Hayes at once and ask her to visit our office tomorrow morning at her earliest convenience. Tell her I wish Mr. Cromb to come with her. Advise me tonight if she consents and remain where you are till further orders."

Almost any other task would have been more agreeable than to return to the white-faced girl. It had to be done, and she helped me by bearing up bravely and readily promising to take the morning express. She even called Cromb on the telephone and gained his consent to accompany her.

That evening I was rather surprised to be informed by the clerk that a lady wished to

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see me in the parlor. My first thought was of Mary Falow, but the moment I entered the room and a veiled woman advanced to greet me I recognized her as Miss Hayes.

"I had to come tonight. I didn't dare telephone," she whispered in deep agitation. "I found this in the library—tucked behind some papers in a pigeon hole in the desk. I thought you ought to know at once."

She handed me a roll of bank notes. I was dumfounded. Another piece of the Chief's puzzle picture was being swept into the discard.

"You've counted them, of course?" I asked.

"I believe there's five hundred dollars," she faintly answered.

I ran them over hastily; the total was correct, but the bills were nearly all twenties. I remembered what the banker said about fifty ten-dollar bills, and felt a great sympathy for her.

"It won't do, Miss Hayes," I sadly announced. "This is not the same money your grandfather took from the bank."

"How? What do you mean?" she asked, leaning against the marble-topped center-table for support.

"You placed this money in the desk before you found it," I replied. "Why did you do that?"

"The District Attorney knows grandfather drew five hundred from the bank just before he died," she said, speaking with considerable difficulty. "After you left, Mr. Cromb called at the door and suggested we motor to town instead of taking the train. I preferred the train. He told me, as he was leaving, that the District Attorney had learned about the money and that it looked bad for my brother."

"Then he suggested planting the money for you to find and kindly did so, having brought the roll with him," I quickly supplied.

She was confused and would not answer me. Her manner was a complete confession. When she did speak it was to say—

"He thought the District Attorney ought to be told before he had time to come here and search, or even announce that he knew about the money."

In a flash I saw her great danger, and, mad with anxiety, cried—

"You haven't informed his office about the money?"

"No," she sobbed. "I—I tried to get his office, but it was closed. Then I thought you could do it for me—make it easier for me. If it only could have been found—honestly!"

Deeply relieved, I patted her hand and said comfortingly:

"Matters would have been ten times worse for your brother had you succeeded in getting the District Attorney's office. Thank Heavens you didn't! I'll walk back with you and you shall search—honestly. When Mr. Chapel inquires about the money you can tell him the result of your search—honestly. But don't, if you value your brother's life, your friend Ashley's life, ever again be tempted to manufacture evidence. It can be improvised in a few moments, but it may require a lifetime to wipe it out."

I did not censure Cromb; I preferred to do that in person. It was the second occasion of his butting in—first he tried to steal the spear and now he endeavored to lose five hundred dollars. Then there was the District Attorney's knack of finding out things the Bureau believed were unsuspected. There was the matter of the suitcase; now came the money.

CHAPTER VII

THE BLACK BAG

SHOW me my work and I can do it, but I have my limitations when it comes to taking the lead. This is probably the reason why for twenty years I've remained Mr. Butterworth's assistant instead of having a shop of my own. My associations with the Chief had taught me to ask but few questions and seldom to be surprised at anything he did. Nevertheless, I could not conceal my amazement when he entered the dining-room and with a genial bow joined me at breakfast.

"Interview with Miss Hayes and Cromb off, sir?" I politely inquired.

"I motored up after receiving a telephone message that she and Cromb were on their way to town," he replied. "I've left orders for them to remain till I return."

"Then it was all a blind, and you didn't intend to meet them when you had me deliver your message last evening!" I charged, feeling peevish. "Why don't you sometimes tell me what purpose you're nursing in the back of your mind?"

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"Jethuel—" and his voice was fond and comforting, although I knew he was smoothing me down—"I often change my views. Why load your virgin mind up with a mess of half-formed suspicions and plans, and just as you get to taking them seriously have to ask you to forget it all and be prepared to see a situation from another angle? I'm not reticent from any whim or eccentricity. But I must have one unbiased brain near me to weigh those theories I've proven to be plausible if not true. I know you'll excuse me if I refuse to state the nature of my business up here till I've learned whether or no I'm on the right scent. Suppose we walk about the town."

We wandered in what seemed to me to be an aimless fashion for some thirty minutes, gradually leaving the thickly settled portion of the place behind us. As we entered the outskirts, where the houses were scattered, the Chief livened up and trotted along more decisively. I told him of Miss Hayes' attempt to manufacture evidence at the instigation of Cromb.

He winced and remarked:

"Trust a woman to mix things up! It's only by a lucky chance she didn't plunge the whole case into chaos. We must rebuke Brother Cromb for meddling."

"The case appears to be quite chaotic now," I muttered.

"Hardly," he bruskly replied. "The fragments of the puzzle are accumulating. One piece hints at the trail leading away from young Hayes."

"The black bag?"

"Precisely. After we've found a few more sections we'll take a day off and put the picture together. Whose face will it portray, eh? Neither you nor I can answer now. But what now is so bewildering will stand forth clear and logical, and the entire situation can be explained in one line of type. All the facts and events that now seem so illogical and meaningless will prove to be most natural and orderly in their sequence.

"Everything is either a mystery or a miracle till explained. The solution invariably is very simple. It's our intellects that are at fault, not the case. If we only had the power to pick out the major point in a problem and concentrate on that there would be no baffling enigma. I believe we've arrived. I forgot to mention I purpose making an early call."

"Quite right," I cheerily responded; nor would I have asked the identity of our prospective host for any amount of money.

My attitude amused him, for he was trying to smother a smile as we entered a driveway and approached a long, rambling building, whose exterior needed paint. The grounds were quite spacious but entirely neglected. Weeds and grass grew rank, and the premises gave the general impression of decay and desolation.

Oh, but I did want to pump in one question! The Chief detected my desire with a sidelong glance of his shrewd old eyes, and I kept my lips buttoned. Mounting the worn stone steps, he sounded the knocker and waited. Nearly a minute passed with no one heeding our summons. He repeated the tattoo loudly. All was quiet within.

"No one at home," I maliciously decided.

"If there's no one at home I've made an ass of myself, and you'll never satisfy your burning curiosity," he retorted scowling at the door. "I shall be cruelly disappointed if so simple and logical a line of reasoning proves to be faulty. Would you kindly agitate the knocker continuously till I tell you to desist?"

I started a thunderous rumble through the house, and was rather priding myself on my technique when I noticed he was standing in the driveway, staring upward.

"Enough!" he sharply ordered. Then he called out, "Come down here and admit us!"

"Who are you? What do you want?" answered a low voice.

"I'm Mr. Butterworth, the lawyer," impatiently returned the Chief. "And I want to get in. If you don't open the door immediately I'll telephone to the District Attorney and have him force an entrance."

There was a moment's silence; then the voice surrendered.

"I'm coming."

Rubbing his hands softly, Mr. Butterworth joined me on the stoop. He was highly pleased with himself and remarked:

"My reasoning wasn't faulty after all. It pleases an old man to know his mind is keen and alert, even if his arteries are hardening."

There was a movement behind the door; then a bolt was shot back and through a four-inch opening the person inside demanded—

"What do you want?"

"No! Now, this won't do. Open the

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door," ordered Mr. Butterworth. "We won't bite you, my dear."

The door slowly swung inward, and I found myself gaping at the haggard face of Mary Falow, the domestic. Even in my surprise I was coherent enough to compliment the old chap with an admiring gaze. Sometimes he was human enough to find a relish in my homage, and he murmured—

"With only a raincoat and felt hat missing one might expect an informal neighborly visit, eh?"

"What do you want here?" demanded the maid.

"To detain you but briefly," my employer assured her, stepping into the hall. "Mr. Cromb in?"

"He's away for the morning," she answered, her colorless voice and stiff attitude reminding me of an automaton.

"Then I must talk with you, Mary," smiled Mr. Butterworth. "Why did you leave Miss Hayes?"

"I refuse to tell you anything," she sharply replied, setting her lips tightly.

"It's of no great importance," said Mr. Butterworth, "for I already know. You wanted Cromb to have the black bag."

Her face grew livid with fear and she shriveled up in a low chair, glaring at him like some wild animal helpless in a trap.

"The bag? You know—what do you know about the bag?" she choked.

"No, no, Mary," the Chief gently rebuked her. "It won't do; really it won't. Now go and fetch it like a good girl. We'll wait here."

"I don't know what you're talking about," she sullenly said, arising as she regained some control of her emotions.

"Young woman, unless you fetch that bag within ten minutes, with all the articles that were originally in it, I shall telephone the police."

He took out his watch and began counting the seconds. With a low cry of despair she ran up the stairs.

"One of the prettiest bits in the whole case," he murmured.

BEFORE I could make reply the domestic was back and had hurled the black bag at our feet. I picked it up and eagerly turned it over. There was a diamond-shaped label on the bottom, and the leather was sadly gouged in several places. I opened it and found the ordinary toilet articles of a gentleman's traveling-outfit.

Mr. Butterworth wiped his spectacles carefully and said:

"You have no cause to fear us, Mary. Tell me how you came by this bag."

She pressed her lips tightly together and eyed him defiantly. He shook his head sadly and observed:

"You refuse to enlighten me. Why did Cromb want the bag?"

I believed she would continue stubborn; but after a slight hesitation she answered:

"Because he wanted to help Mr. Hayes and Miss Ruth. He didn't want it found there."

The Chief weighed this statement carefully, and then inquired—

"When do you return to the Dustin home?"

"Never!" This very firmly.

"You can hardly stay here with Mr. Cromb," he reminded her. She made no reply and he tried another tack. "Who else lives here?"

"Mr. Cromb lives alone," she shortly informed him.

He beamed on her and cheerfully said:

"Then we have the house quite to ourselves and may as well look about a bit. You are our hostess, Miss Mary."

With desperation distorting her features she faced us.

"What do you expect to find?" she cried. "I forbid you searching this place."

"Searching?" he echoed in a shocked voice. "What would Mr. Cromb say if he knew you'd used that word in talking to us? Why should any one dream of *searching* this house?" Then he mused: "Yet you're in charge here and I desire to be regular. Jethuel, I see a telephone. Call up the District Attorney's office and inform Chapel we've found Miss Falow."

"Stop!" she cried as I made to obey. "I'll show you the house—on one condition. You're not to tell any one I'm here."

"Suppose we trade," whimsically offered the Chief. "I'll keep your presence here a secret for a few days, if you'll keep our visit a secret from Cromb for twenty-four hours. What people know not never happened, Mary."

"I agree," she answered.

Having formed this pact, we followed her through the hall to the scantily furnished living-rooms. There was no suggestion of

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opulence in the furnishings; nothing to indicate even moderate means, nor an ability to supply half a thousand dollars in fake evidence.

"My room is the only one used upstairs," the maid informed us after we had finished the ground floor. "Are you satisfied?"

"I believe you," said the Chief, "but I would hazard a guess that Mr. Cromb has one or two store rooms upstairs which he keeps locked; and that while you've tested the door several times, you've never looked inside them."

The shot told, for a blotch of red suddenly blossomed in her pale cheeks.

"You're a devil!" she hissed.

"I don't think so," laughed the Chief, much pleased at his own astuteness. "I'm simply a foolish, benevolent old man, who tries to help stupid humanity out of trouble. Now we'll go upstairs."

Perhaps the opportunity to peep into the sealed room reduced her opposition. She led the way to the second floor without further protest. We passed down the long hall, with rooms on either side given up to dust and dirt. But at the end of the hall we came to a door fashioned from heavy timbers and equipped with a lock.

"Yale or Chubb, or what?" anxiously inquired my employer as I stooped to examine it.

"Neither," it pleased me to reply. "He has considered the ordinary lock sufficient. I'll have it in a moment."

Mr. Butterworth has remarked that I would have made my mark as a burglar because of my knack of coaxing stubborn locks. But the one before me was disgustingly easy to manipulate, and required only one turn of my master key. I wondered the maid had never conquered it. I swung the door open.

Crossing the threshold, we beheld numerous shelves filled with objects of art. It reminded me strongly of the Dustin study. The Chief fell into his old trick of rubbing his hands as he eagerly scanned the first shelf.

"Here's a Louis XV inkstand," he murmured, touching it lovingly. "I wonder if it's genuine." And he reached for his pocket glass, exclaimed impatiently at not finding it and snapping his fingers as he waited for me to pass over mine.

"Fake?" I inquired.

After using the glass for a moment he exulted:

"It's genuine! What do we have next? Ah, Limoges enamels! Excellent! Excellent!"

"Genuine?"

"Forgeries!" he enthusiastically replied. "But what skill! What beautiful imitations! And see here! Two Dresden clocks. Alas, they're genuine."

I felt disappointed for him, although I could not deduce why it pleased him to find counterfeits.

"Please notice this Dutch rococo silver that looks like lead because of its age," he resumed at the second shelf.

"It must be genuine," I confidently observed.

"Wrong!" he laughed. "Imitation."

"You must give a different verdict on this ivory crucifix," I challenged. "Age has stained it a deep yellow."

He examined it critically and observed:

"Stained with tobacco or licorice juice. It's an old trick. The red-and-black Chinese-lacquers, supposed to have come from the reign of Louis XV, aren't as old as Miss Hayes. It works out beautifully."

"What does it all mean?" broke in the domestic's voice.

"That you must return to the Dustin house, where there are *some* genuine antiques," quickly responded the Chief. "Here's another door. It must lead to the workshop."

It did. There were a bench and the material with which Cromb could so cleverly imitate antiques. Several enamel snuff boxes caught my eye. They were finished, and Mr. Butterworth pronounced them to be exquisite counterfeits.

"They do this sort of thing amazingly well in Europe," he continued, picking up some Battersea *bonbonnières* only half disguised by Cromb's cunning skill. "Hanau makes a specialty of reproductions in old silver. Cologne ranks first in imitating antique glass. Vienna doubtless furnishes the best counterfeits of sixteenth-century enamels. If you desire a spurious polychrome Renaissance beaker you should visit the dealers in Nuremberg, while Lunéville will supply your wants in fake bisque figures."

"I DIDN'T know you were so well posted on this sort of a game," I said admiringly.

"I wasn't posted on the fake end of it till after I learned the smashed Chelsea vase

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was a counterfeit. That discovery caused me to wonder why an expert in such matters should pronounce the vase genuine after having been given an opportunity to examine nearly all the shards. So I read up a bit. Let me call your attention to the *old* French pottery on yonder table. I see Strasbourg, Rouen, Moustiers and Nevers —all fakes. It's simply amazing. He certainly is a very clever, artistic man."

"This connects importantly with the case?" I whispered, taking pains to evade the maid's sharp ears.

"It's a necessary section in the puzzle picture," he slowly replied. "It existed before the picture took on the homicide *motif*. It connects closely with the trail of the black bag, which I've already said leads away from young Hayes. I believe we can go now."

The domestic did not speak till we were in the lower hall, when she said—

"You've promised to say nothing about my being here."

"On the condition that for twenty-four hours you say nothing to Cromb about our visit here," he reminded her. "If there arises any imperative reason for telling him, your promise need not bind you. But remember, you've already told enough falsehoods in the last three weeks. For the last time, will you return to the Dustin house?"

"No!"

"If you attempt to leave Rhinehill and disappear you'll be apprehended very quickly. Bear that in mind. Does Cromb want you to stay here?"

Her face worked convulsively and the Chief's gaze softened.

"Poor girl!" He patted her shoulder as she buried her face in her hands. "Poor Mary Falow! If some one could only have warned you that lords and lovers sometimes behave differently in life than they do in fiction."

Careless of her tears, she raised her head proudly and earnestly declared:

"Mr. Cromb has always treated me with the greatest respect. He's never suspected any secret of mine. He's in love with Miss Ruth."

The Chief looked his relief, and after a few words of wholesome advice motioned me to take the bag and precede him. As we walked to Rhinehill he made no offer at conversation, and I knew he was weighing the girl's status.

When we drew up before the hotel he commented:

"The domestic thinks she loves Cromb. Cromb is very polished and cultured, despite his cleverness in counterfeiting. She says he does not suspect her infatuation and I believe her and am thankful for her. She knows he's in love with Miss Hayes, however. Now I wonder how far that knowledge would incite her to injure the reputation of a member of that family."

During the trip to town Mr. Butterworth seldom lifted his gaze from his small notebook, and more than once, while we were spinning over a level stretch, he jotted down additional data.

On arriving at the office we were interested to find a telegram from Ashley, dated Rochester. It read:

> Goods sold Kelson & Steger, jobbers, New York City, year ago. Had company from D. A. office all way out. He is near me now. But lost him when tracing goods.

"They hoped he would lead them to Hayes," chuckled the Chief. "Suppose you run down to Kelson's and see what you can learn."

The manager of the firm was very affable when I had identified myself and was eager to do all in his power to aid me, but said it would be quite impossible to determine which dealer bought any particular bag.

"They're not numbered like watches and rifles," he reminded me. "We shipped that particular lot broadcast all over the country."

"Might I look at the order books for that period?" I asked.

These were readily placed at my disposal, and a few minutes impressed me with the hopelessness of the task. There was page after page of names, with the shipments radiating all over New England, to the South and as far West as the Mississippi River.

Nevertheless I stuck to the job nearly all the afternoon before I hit on a clue. There was one order for twelve of the bags sent in by a dealer in Rhinehill. It was all I could dig from the books, and jotting down the name I hastened back to the office.

Mr. Butterworth readily agreed I had an important clue and urged—

"Get the dealer on the telephone at once and ask if he recalls selling any such bags within the last year."

As I was about to take down the receiver

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the stenographer opened the door and announced that Chapel desired to talk with either Mr. Butterworth or me.

"Hello, Chapel," I greeted. "What's on your mind?"

"Say, Jethuel, what in sin did the Bureau send Ashley out to Rochester to trace that bag for? Why didn't you come to us? It's one of a lot the Rochester firm sent to Kelson & Steger, this city, and was sold by the latter to Styson, of Rhinehill."

I must have looked very foolish, for the Chief leaned forward and whispered—

"What's up?"

Motioning him to be patient I answered:

"Ashley needed exercise. Suppose you kept close tabs on him?"

"Dunbar wires he never had an easier job," cheerily returned Chapel. "They're both homeward bound now. By the way, Styson failed in business three months ago and went to Southern California."

"Whom did he sell the bag to?"

"To young Hayes, of course. Hayes was home about nine months ago."

"YOU'RE sure of that?" I pressed.

"There are some things we can afford to take for granted," ironically reminded Chapel. "That is, unless you believe Hayes stole the bag." And I could hear him snicker at his own wit.

I thanked him and explained to the Chief. He was as highly amused as I was chagrined.

"Don't you see," he exulted, "the District Attorney has no suspicion that there are two bags in the case? When we spring the genuine bag it'll damage his theory seriously. So Ashley thought he'd shaken Dunbar off the trail, eh? Ha! Ha!"

I was in no mood for merriment and cut him short by demanding—

"Where did Mary Falow get the money she spent in hats, shoes and dresses?"

His mirth subsided and a faraway look crept into his eyes.

"That portion of the puzzle picture is a bit obscure," he confessed. "If the D. A. knew what we know he would contend young Hayes kept her in funds. The presence of the black bag and fountain pen in her room would lead the prosecution to believe she was unusually desirous of shielding him. If the D. A. knew what we learned at the Cromb house this morning he might change to the theory of the money coming from Cromb. Then there is one more theory which brings her in close contact with the homicide."

"The missing five hundred dollars?"

"Exactly. And yet that theft wouldn't pay for dresses bought six months ago, unless we want to imagine the domestic as having credit, which would be ridiculous. Either some one gave her money or she stole it. If she stole small sums in the past, why shouldn't she steal the five hundred?"

Whenever unable to make up my mind as to the most plausible solution of a problem I always grew ill-tempered. Mr. Butterworth's disposition was directly opposite. He would con his notebook lovingly, weighing all possible clues much as he would study his chess board. I wanted things cleared up, as I was continually thinking of Miss Ruth's anguish, her brother's mysterious absence and the fact that the Grand Jury was daily hearing the evidence and would soon present a *prima-facie* case against Hayes and the artist.

CHAPTER VIII

TWO LINEN DUSTERS

IT'S seldom a visitor to the Bureau of Abnormal Litigation creates in me any emotion of surprise. I've seen too many men and women from all stations in life enter our office. But just prior to leaving for lunch, two days after Ashley returned from Rochester, I was amazed to behold Cromb rush into the private office in a most disorderly manner.

It was his style of entering rather than his mere presence that startled me. Even the Chief was taken aback, although he waited calmly for the man to explain his rough behavior. The moment he was over the threshold and the door closed behind him he turned upon us a face malignant with hate. Raising his soft hat in his clinched fist, he dashed it passionately to the floor. Then he advanced toward me with a baleful glare in his dark eyes.

I was on my feet in an instant, warning:

"Stand back! No man approaches me with that expression in his face."

"You —— coward!" he choked.

"Here, here!" broke in Mr. Butterworth. "Mr. Cromb, explain yourself, sir."

"Explain!" he bitterly repeated, maintaining a threatening attitude toward me. "Explain to a couple of ruffians!"

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"No; explain to two gentlemen," quietly corrected Mr. Butterworth, whirling his swing chair about till he was clear of the desk. "I suppose you have a purpose in coming here? What is it?"

"As if you didn't know!" gritted Cromb, his hands working convulsively and his gaze focused on my throat. "This hireling of yours at least knows."

Standing on my guard, I shook my head and demanded:

"What's the game? Spit it out."

He half turned and disclosed a white bandage on the back of his head.

"I received that last night while I was asleep. It rendered me unconscious for some time," he informed us, his voice trembling. Then in a crescendo of rage, "And you, sir, are the man who dealt me the blow!"

And he was upon me.

But I was a stronger man than he, and somewhat versed in the art of self-defense. I contented myself with catching him by the arms and giving them a twist that sent him reeling against the wall, white with pain.

"You go too fast," I said as he hesitated, undecided whether or not to attack me again. "Because you break into a man's room in the night with a loaded revolver is no reason for deducing I'd break in and use a club. You don't pretend to say that you saw me?"

"Hardly," he panted. "I was smashed over the head while asleep."

"Take a chair, Mr. Cromb," urged Mr. Butterworth. "The remainder of the assault can wait a bit. My assistant was at my house last night. He was not in Rhinehill. His alibi is perfect."

Cromb eyed him with mingled fear and incredulity. There was something so convincing in the Chief's stern face that he gave up his murderous designs on me and sank into a chair, mumbling: "But it must have been he. If not, how did this get into my private room?"

It was our turn to be nonplussed when he placed on the desk my pocket magnifying-glass, the one I had loaned the Chief the day we examined the counterfeit antiques.

"I believe this is yours? It has your name on the rim," he said.

I nodded and Mr. Butterworth explained:

"It belongs to Jethuel. Two days ago I was in your house, admiring your collection. I borrowed the glass and must have left it on the shelf. He has not been in Rhinehill since."

"Looking at my collection?" muttered Cromb, his color again rising. "That's the reason of the fool errand Miss Hayes and I went on when we came here and waited half a day for you to show up."

"I'm afraid it was," coolly admitted the Chief. "But Miss Hayes knew nothing of my plans. I asked her to call and bring you. She acted in good faith. I went through your house quite thoroughly."

The rage in the man's face began to fade out and he picked up his hat. His eyes filled with doubt and uneasiness.

"Who gave me this wound?" he asked, gingerly caressing the back of his head.

"I don't know," gravely said Mr. Butterworth. "Doesn't Miss Falow have some idea?"

I think it was the first time he realized that we must have met the domestic, for his pale face reddened and for a bit he was deeply confused. He endeavored to accept our knowledge as a matter of course and sullenly informed us:

"She's gone. Disappeared some time during the night."

"I make no suggestions," murmured Mr. Butterworth, "but possibly already you are framing new suspicions."

"Was your only purpose to examine my collection?" he asked, his eyes narrowing.

"It was one purpose. I also wanted to get the black bag—the one the District Attorney knows nothing about," readily replied Mr. Butterworth. "I have it. Listen, Cromb; the District Attorney has been almost uncanny in learning things about this case the Bureau believed weren't to be found out. If he learns about that bag I'll tell him how you had it in your house."

Cromb wilted. It was evident he knew nothing about our taking the bag. He tried to bolster himself up by saying—

"Curse your nerve!"

"Off the same piece, perhaps, that led you into my room with a loaded revolver in your pocket," I suggested.

"I went into your room to help Miss Hayes," he argued. "I got possession of that bag from the same motive. I want to save her brother. There's no danger of my telling the authorities about it."

"Then we have the same desire at heart—to help Miss Hayes," said the Chief.

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"I'm sorry we're working at cross-purposes."

"You're working for Ashley," growled Cromb, getting ugly again. "I don't care what becomes of him. He deserves all he gets."

"Hold!" thundered Mr. Butterworth, smiting the desk with his fist. "This isn't the first time you've intimated you possess knowledge that reflects unwholesomely upon my client. I demand to know what you're holding back."

"I don't have to talk to you," sullenly retorted Cromb.

"Ah!" slowly murmured Mr. Butterworth, leaning forward and studying the man sharply. "Once you said you might prove Ashley was in the house and left it after Hayes had departed."

"It's the truth!" cried Cromb.. "He left by the side door. I'll call a witness to prove it, too."

"You certainly must make good your assertion," grimly assured Mr. Butterworth. "I'll see that you explain before the Grand Jury. The Bureau doesn't desire to shield any one by concealing legitimate evidence. To leave that phase of the matter for the moment, please tell me your purpose in counterfeiting various works of art."

UP TO this time I'm positive Cromb had no idea we had discovered his forgeries. It required nearly a minute for him to assemble his nerve and meet the Chief's query, which was more of an accusation than a question. At last he said:

"I'm a poor man. I love curios and antiques. I can not afford to buy the genuine. I try to satisfy myself with imitations of them."

"You do your work very cleverly," indorsed Mr. Butterworth. "You speak of being poor. I trust you've received your five hundred dollars back from Miss Hayes."

His lips twitched at the shot, but he was quite ready in saying:

"So she told you? Undoubtedly it was an unwise scheme, but I was desperate in my desire to save John. I have my money back, and need it sadly now. Mr. Dustin, my patron, is gone."

The Chief bowed gravely and asked, "You've copied several of the antiques in the Dutch collection?"

"I have." This defiantly.

"You have in your possession the Louis XV inkstand, which belongs to the Dustin collection."

Cromb was losing his own confidence very fast, but he managed to control his voice as he acknowledged:

"I have it temporarily. Mr. Dustin permitted me to borrow various articles to copy. He was interested in my work."

The Chief's smile was sardonic as he inquired:

"Did he always insist you keep the original after you'd copied it? For you have the original and the collection has the fake."

Cromb shifted his position; but he was good at squirming out of tight places, and he sounded plausible as he explained:

"I took the copy over for him to examine the day before he was murdered. I wasn't sure if my work was satisfactory or not. If he failed to indorse it I intended to work on it some more. I kept the original at home till I could know if my copy was complete. He set the copy aside and said he would examine it later. He knew his grandson was about to arrive and had no thoughts for art. Since his death the matter of returning the original has slipped my mind."

"The Chelsea vase, found broken on the floor, was your handiwork, of course?"

Now I believed we had him cornered, but he composedly answered:

"Yes. I had left it for him to criticize the same day I left the inkstand."

"You were positive it was satisfactory, for you returned the original."

"That is true," slowly assented Cromb, feeling his way cautiously. "It was of less importance than the inkstand. It was not worth working over longer."

"Mr. Cromb, why did you identify the shards of the fraudulent vase as being the genuine Chelsea vase when you knew it was a fake, turned out in your little shop?" demanded the Chief.

Cromb lowered his eyes.

"I was placed in a hard position. So far as the law goes it makes no difference whether a genuine vase or a copy was broken in that room. But it might have been awkward for me to have explained. It might have given people a wrong impression, especially art dealers. And I must make a living from art. If I've done wrong I'll amend my testimony and say the broken vase was an imitation."

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"It does me good to hear you speak like that," applauded Mr. Butterworth, now the personification of cordiality. "I can well appreciate your dilemma."

Cromb arose and faltered:

"I came here with great anger in my heart. I wish to apologize to both you gentlemen. I thought my provocation very great. It was the cruelty of the assault, unnecessary and intended to kill, which maddened me. I trust you bear me no ill will. I shall take up the matter of the vase with Mr. Chapel shortly. If you don't mind, I'll permit him to think I've just discovered it was one of my copies rather than the original. It makes the situation more graceful for me and does no harm."

"By all means!" cried Mr. Butterworth. "And very handsomely spoken, Mr. Cromb. We shall be interested to learn the identity of your assailant."

"I fear that is quite hopeless to expect," muttered Cromb, adjusting his hat carefully and bowing himself out.

Mr. Butterworth arose and paced the floor with nervous strides. Then he said:

"An example of lying as a fine art. The man can counterfeit the truth as neatly as he can imitate Louis XV inkstands. Make the noon suburban and learn what you can about Mary Falow's second disappearance. My threat doesn't seem to have had much effect. Also ask Miss Hayes if Cromb was allowed to borrow from the collection. It won't be necessary to inform her of our visit to his house."

A GLANCE at Miss Hayes's face, and I knew she had something of importance to tell me. After taking me to the living-room she said: "Mary Falow is back."

This bit of intelligence caught me off my guard, and while I struggled with surprise she continued:

"Yes, she's back. I don't know when she came in or how she got in. All the doors were locked this morning and she was asleep in her room. I asked her where she'd been, and she said she couldn't tell. She's in a bad nervous state and stays much in her room. I've been trying to decide whether I should keep her or not."

"Keep her by all means," I advised. "Would you mind if I saw her alone for a few minutes?"

She willingly consented to my wish, and after some minutes of waiting the domestic entered. She walked like an elderly person, with no elasticity in her step. Her face, too, was haggard, and I pitied her.

She ignored my greeting and without seating herself asked—

"What do you want of me?"

"I want to know why you returned here."

"Mr. Butterworth urged me to do so," she reminded me.

"Did you know Cromb was assaulted last night and badly wounded in the head? Or was it after you left the house?" I next asked.

She slipped into a chair and buried her face in her hands. I knew by the tremor of her slight form that she was weeping bitterly.

"I struck him," she whispered without raising her head. "I didn't mean to hurt him very much, but I had to strike him."

"Had to?" I exclaimed. "Why?"

She jerked up her head suddenly and for an instant her eyes flamed with rage.

"Because of you!" she hissed. "Because of you and that meddling old man!"

It was a puzzler and it bothered me.

"But how?" I worried.

"He missed the black bag," she wearily explained. "He asked for it. I could not tell him. He believed I'd hid it. He rushed at me—fearfully enraged. I protected myself. I struck him. That's all."

"You had a weapon handy? You expected him to assault you?"

"I used one of his heavy walking-sticks that stood in the corner," she mumbled. "I can't talk any more."

She abruptly fled from the room.

She was a resourceful liar. I paid her that tribute while waiting for Miss Hayes to join me. I also speculated on what the Chief would think of this new section to his puzzle picture. With Miss Hayes' return I took up the other portion of my errand.

"Was it your grandfather's habit to loan any articles from his collection?" I inquired as she seated herself.

"No," she tersely responded. "He loaned to the museum; never to an individual."

"But wouldn't he loan an antique to a friend?" I persisted.

She shook her head emphatically, then looked at me keenly. As she studied me I saw the old trouble light return to her eyes. I suspected she was regretting her answer,

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and I became convinced when she slowly amended it by adding:

"Of course I mustn't speak too positively. I shouldn't say he never loaned anything. I know he prized each antique highly and enjoyed having them about him. There might be circumstances which would induce him to loan to a close friend."

I saw it was useless to pursue that line farther, and digressed to ask—

"Does the domestic know we went through her trunk?"

"Oh, no. And she mustn't know it. I feel guilty when I think of it."

"Did you ever make her any presents in money?"

"Not to amount to anything. I gave her clothing and the like."

This ended the interview, and I started for the hotel. I had nearly covered the distance when some one called my name and I turned to discover Backus puffing behind me. He was carrying something under his arm—a squat parcel wrapped in paper; and he appeared perturbed, either from his exertions or because of what he had to say.

"You've given me a hard chase, sir," he panted. "I ain't as young as I once was, and you walk very fast."

"What can I do for you?" I asked.

"I found something this morning, sir, what I think you ought to know about. Not as I can see as how it'll help Master John any; but facts is facts, just the same," he earnestly replied.

"You have it in the paper?" I asked, reaching for the parcel.

"Not out in the street, sir," he protested. "Let's git under cover."

This was sensible in him, and I ushered him to my room in the inn. After I'd closed the door he unwrapped the parcel. It contained a linen duster, such as autoists wear; and the collar and neck of the garment were caked dry with dark brown stains.

"Where did you get this?" I inquired.

"In the rubbish barrel back of the kitchen," he explained. "The barrel was full and I wheeled it down to leave it for the cart to take. I have a big box at the end of the lot and empty the barrel into that whenever it gits full. When I dumped it I seen this, and it struck me as queer."

"Did you ever see it before?" I questioned, shaking out the duster and feeling positive the stains were made by blood.

"Mr. Dustin used to wear it in his study sometimes," he replied. "But it's mighty funny."

"Why funny?" I fished, anxious to get at his inner thoughts.

"Because if that's blood some one must have taken it off'n him after he was killed, sir. For when Miss Ruth found the body he had on just his regular clothes."

"You've done well, James," I approved. "Don't mention finding it till I give the word."

"I'll hold my tongue, sir, never fear," he promised. "It seemed connected with the case, and I knew you lawyer fellers are keen not to have evidence lost in dumps. Now I'll be going back."

"I'll go with you," I said, wrapping up the duster and placing it in my bag. As we walked and chatted idly I spoke of Mary Falow's return. He shook his head gloomily, saying:

"But where's she been? She won't say a word. She's a sick woman. I'm afraid she'll break out again and never come back."

I was not prepared to deny this possibility, and urged him to keep an eye on her goings and comings, and to notify the office promptly if he observed anything suspicious.

At the risk of disturbing Miss Hayes's peace of mind I went first to the rear of the premises where the refuse awaited the collector. He pointed out the receptacle into which he had emptied the barrel, and I soon had its contents scattered over the ground. In the débris were several dark-stained newspapers, and I unreservedly pronounced the discolorations to be blood. These showed conclusively that the garment had been thrust into the barrel while wet with blood.

Impressing on Backus the necessity of saying nothing, I returned to the front door and rang the bell. Mary Falow answered, her eyes big with questions as I asked to see Miss Hayes.

When Miss Hayes descended and her gaze inquired the reason of my return, I was pleased to believe she had not seen me prowling at the rear of the grounds. As the domestic was lingering about the foot of the stairs I motioned with my eyes to the living-room, where we could enjoy privacy. Miss Hayes quickly took the hint and led the way to the veranda. Then I inquired—

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"Was your grandfather ever in the habit of wearing a long linen duster in the study?"

"He did at times," she said, looking much surprised.

"Did he have it on when you discovered his body?"

Little lines of pain showed in her downcast face as she sadly shook her head.

"Have you it now?" I pursued.

"It's hung up in the small closet at the head of the hall opening off the study," she said. "But what of it?"

I put her off and expressed a desire to inspect it. Puzzled, but ready to aid me, she led the way to the hall and pointed to the closet. As I opened the door I was prepared to hear her exclaim that the duster was missing. Imagine, then, my surprise when she reached in and removed a duster from a hook! I was dumfounded.

"What's the matter?" she anxiously asked. "You look and act queer."

I shook myself together and demanded, "Are you sure this is your grandfather's duster?"

"Why, certainly," she declared without any hesitation. "I used to scold when he would lose the buttons off and never bother to save them. See, it has two kinds of buttons——" And she held up the duster for my inspection. "I couldn't match the missing ones. In desperation I used this heavy black thread in sewing them on."

It was even so; the buttons were stoutly sewn on with black linen thread. Nor was there any blood on the garment.

"He didn't have another duster?" I hopelessly inquired.

"Only this one. He was as careless about its appearance as Mr. Cromb was fussy about his. Grandfather's always looked rowdyish, I used to tell him, while Mr. Cromb's was quite immaculate."

I felt as if some one had struck me a mighty blow on top of the head and inwardly asked—

"How does this section fit in with the puzzle picture, Mr. Butterworth?"

Aloud I asked—

"Did Mr. Cromb ever leave his garment here?"

"It's back there on one of the hooks," she replied. "But for the life of me I don't understand why a linen duster should interest you. I'll get it." And she disappeared in the closet. After a brief search she appeared, flushed of face and with her hair disheveled.

"It's gone!" she announced. "He must have taken it home. He always kept it there so he could slip it on when he entered."

"When entering by the side door," I supplemented.

"Yes. He had a key. It was grandfather's wish that he come and go as he pleased without bothering to ring and be admitted by the maid. Is there anything else?"

I answered in the negative and returned to the front of the house. As I was leaving she detained me and with a strong display of emotion whispered—

"Don't you think it would be all right for Mr. Ashley—not to come here, but—but——"

She floundered hopelessly.

"You want to meet him?" I sympathetically helped her out.

She nodded her head violently, tears standing in her eyes.

"I haven't seen him to talk with him since the time I took the suitcase to his studio, and then we were too deeply agitated to say anything. I haven't felt like seeing any one. But now I'd—I'd like to tell him—how I feel—that I feel just the same. I begin to realize how he must suffer."

Her frank confession won me to her side at once. I'm what might be termed a gnarled specimen of humanity, and few women ever bothered to confide in me. I felt the little woman had highly privileged me, and I readily suggested that she visit our Bureau in the morning and walk into the private office. Her eyes glistened with appreciation and for the first time she caught my hand and pressed it warmly. Then I hastened to make my train, anxious to present the duster to the Chief.

CHAPTER IX

THE PICTURE GROWS AMAZINGLY

THE next three days sent my poor, methodical brain reeling, so replete were they with happenings; but my employer continued in the best of humor. First there was the meeting between the lovers in the private office, with the Chief grumbling and condemning all "billing and cooing

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business," but flying about like an angry hen when the stenographer forgot and very nearly invaded the privacy of the rendezvous.

When the two came out they had no secrets from the world, their parting glances and repeated handclasps giving them thoroughly away.

The appearance of Cromb before the Grand Jury was marked by renewed agitation of the case in the daily press. While Grand-Jury proceedings are supposed to be secret, every paper in town practically asserted that Cromb swore he believed a witness could be found who would testify to seeing Ashley leave the Dustin home by the side door after Hayes had departed. As he testified thus the day after Miss Ruth and Ashley made free with our office, I fear jealousy precipitated his avowals. The only comment the Chief would make was simply:

"Very well. Let him tell what some one else told him and then let him produce a witness to substantiate his story. After he's all through I shall have a few questions which I shall demand he answer from personal knowledge, not by hearsay."

He was referring to the linen duster, and I hugged myself in picturing the explosion in the prosecution's camp when we should spring it.

Mary Falow followed Cromb before the Jury, but gave no evidence of value. Before her examination was more than commenced she swooned and was taken from the building in a carriage. From Chapel's chagrin I suspected this was the witness he had depended upon for a corroboration of Cromb's story.

Backus also was called, but gave no evidence of value. I did not tell him to hold back about the duster, although devoutly hoping he would. He told me afterward that he volunteered nothing, believing the Bureau would use the fact to the best advantage when the right time came. A shrewd fellow was Backus.

Nor could I learn that Cromb revealed anything about the black bag or the matter of his being assaulted. I could appreciate how loath he would be to tell of the domestic's visit to his house. And the bag was a second bombshell we were ready to explode.

But these happenings were nothing compared with our sensations when on the morning of the third day Miss Hayes bolted into our presence and displayed every symptom of being highly excited.

"Quick! Read it!" she cried, thrusting a slip of paper into Mr. Butterworth's hands. It was soiled and smeared with dark streaks and was altogether a disreputable-looking bit of stationery. In a pencil scrawl was the message:

> Shall be with you in two days. Don't worry. Can't explain now, but everything must come out O. K. First chance I've had to drop you a line since hearing the awful news. JOHN.

"Is this from your brother?" asked the Chief.

She nodded and cried:

"He says he's innocent. It's just the same as saying that. He's coming in two days!"

"Compose yourself, my dear Miss Hayes," said Mr. Butterworth. "I shall be glad to talk with him, but when he shows up he must be prepared to stand arrest. You must be brave. The Grand Jury will report day after tomorrow, and undoubtedly will hand up indictments against your brother and Mr. Ashley."

All the light went out of her face and she trembled as if cold.

"Will there never be an end?" she moaned.

"Yes," firmly promised the Chief; "there'll be an end when I get one more section for my puzzle. One more, and I'll put it together overnight. But before I can get that I must have a talk with several of you, and each must tell what he and she has held back. I can't put the puzzle together in the dark."

"I—I want to tell you everything," she whispered, dabbing her handkerchief at her eyes.

"I know you do," gently said the Chief. "And tomorrow you will do so. Not now, but tomorrow morning, you're going to tell me all. Ashley must do the same. Cromb and the domestic may hold something back, but I trust not."

"Don't think I know anything about the will," she pleaded. "There are some things I haven't told—others I may not have told just as they happened. But whatever I've said untruthfully was prompted by the desire to save my brother—and Mr. Ashley."

"We believe you," soothed Mr. Butterworth. "Tomorrow we'll hear all your con-

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fidences. Today must be devoted to searching for the will. If it hasn't been destroyed we must find it; for I do not believe your brother took it. We'll search your home first. If nothing is found we'll overhaul the Cromb house. If you're ready I'll take you back to Rhinehill in my car."

"Can any one else go?" she timidly asked.

Mr. Butterworth smiled in his dry, peculiar fashion and delighted me by directing:

"Call up the artist chap, Jethuel, and invite him to take a ride with us. We start at once."

She looked her gratitude, but as we waited for Ashley to arrive she became thoughtful and wept a bit.

"What's the matter?" cried Mr. Butterworth. "I thought we were to cast off gloom."

"I—I was thinking how this might be his last ride if nothing is done—soon."

"God bless my heart!" protested Mr. Butterworth. "Am I not the young man's lawyer? Am I, or am I not?"

"I know you'll do everything possible," she sniveled. "But it looks almost hopeless."

"That's because you don't get a bird's-eye view of the case," comforted the Chief. "Things look different when you get up high. You're living in a closet just now. I must try to tear it down and get you into the sunlight."

His confidence disturbed me. I couldn't see just how he was to make good; and if he didn't there would be another broken-hearted little woman in the world, that's all.

Ashley arrived, slow of pace and gloomy of visage. The moment he beheld Miss Ruth his cares vanished. It was almost a happy party that swept up the Hudson to Rhinehill. We were admitted by Mary Falow, more pale and sickly-looking than ever.

"Now, gentlemen, the house is yours," earnestly said Miss Hayes. "I pray you may be successful."

"Is there any place your grandfather might have used as a hiding-place for the will?" inquired Mr. Butterworth.

"I know of none. It was formerly kept in his safety-deposit vault, but it was removed by him shortly prior to his death. The most natural place would be the library or study. There was where he kept his papers and spent most of his time."

"And the man most likely to know where he kept the will would be Cromb," broke in Ashley, thereby revealing a touch of jealousy.

Mr. Butterworth led the way to the library and directed:

"Begin at the left, Jethuel, and take down every book and make sure it contains no paper. Also note if there are any papers back against the wall. Ashley, do the same, beginning at the right. Miss Hayes and I will examine the drawers in the table and desk."

We fell to with a vim—each, I believe, absorbing some of the Chief's energy and confidence. Book after book we whipped out and shook open. Shelf after shelf we canvassed, but each time we met in the center of the cases there was no luck to report. The most superficial examination convinced us that there could be no secret hiding-place in the wall back of the books.

After more than an hour of this kind of hunting the Chief announced:

"The will isn't in this room unless it's secured to the under side of the rugs or concealed in the window shades or draperies. Turn the rugs back and examine them closely, although we'll find nothing. Pull down the shades, Miss Ruth."

This was soon done. The Chief next ordered encouragingly:

"Now for the study. Miss Ruth and I will look into the vases and all other receptacles while you young men examine the drawers and the closet in the hall. Overlook nothing large enough to contain a paper."

Our enthusiasm was lagging now, although we worked with painstaking care. But ransack the study and closet as we would, there was no trace to be found of the last will and testament of Jacob Dustin.

"WHEW!" puffed Mr. Butterworth after we'd filed back into the library. "It's warm work, with no great amount of reward. But cheer up! It must be in the house—either here or in Cromb's house. We've finished only two rooms. We'll explore the entire building and pay especial attention to Mary's room. Then we'll go through Cromb's place with a fine-tooth comb."

"I've lost confidence," sighed Ashley, tipping the mahogany pedestal a bit without bothering to remove the bronze Norseman. By seizing the bottom of the statuette and

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the top of the pedestal he maneuvered successfully for the first second, then was careless, and the bronze escaped his grasp and fell to the rug.

"Glad it isn't easily broken," he apologized. "I was trying to see if there was any cavity in the pedestal. It's solid. I didn't know——"

"Hurrah!" shouted Mr. Butterworth in a most indecorous manner, and astounded us by fairly flinging himself on all fours beside the bronze, groveling like a football player. "I believe it's here!"

He placed a trembling finger in an aperture in the base of the bronze. As he stood the figure on its head we could see a bit of white.

With a low, guttural, worrying kind of a noise Ashley plumped down beside him while Miss Hayes sank limply into a chair and breathed hard and fast. I remained standing, glaring down into the opening. I was sure the bit of white was the corner of a paper.

"Perhaps I was too precipitate," murmured Mr. Butterworth, "but I'm positive some kind of paper is in the bronze. But let's be prepared to be disappointed as——"

"It's the will!" I exploded as the Chief withdrew enough of the legal paper for me to recognize its nature. "It looks brown and black in spots."

Mr. Butterworth's face was very grave as he gently worked the paper out and unfolded it. I heard Miss Hayes exclaim faintly as the dark stains and splotches were disclosed to view.

"It's blood!" Ashley whispered to me.

Miss Hayes began weeping softly, and I motioned him to take her away. He seemed glad of the opportunity, and the Chief and I were left alone with the all-important instrument.

"Now to see how the property is left," muttered Mr. Butterworth, opening the paper with some difficulty as the smeared edges adhered together.

The instrument was very brief and concise. After the usual paragraph providing for the payment of "all funeral expenses and other just debts," the estate was left in equal shares to Miss Ruth and her brother. Nathan Cromb was mentioned for a legacy of ten thousand dollars. The bequests to the grandchildren were free of all restrictions. Nor was John Hayes censured for his wandering life.

"The date!" I cried, afraid the will had been drawn years before. Again we were delighted, for the instrument had been executed two months prior to the testator's death.

"That eliminates various motives we've been worrying about," exulted the Chief. "It's evidence absolute that neither of the grandchildren, nor Ashley, nor Cromb had any motive in secreting it."

"Let's not forget the blood stains," I reminded him. "They ought to tell us something."

"They tell us the old man in falling rested on the will, or else his slayer handled it with bloody hands. I'm inclined to the latter belief, since the murderer placed it in the bronze. Perhaps the microscope will reveal some of the finger marks that are so conveniently present in melodramas and detective yarns. The only impression I get is that the assassin wiped his hands on it. That's what gives it the twisted, crumpled look."

"Right for a dollar," I agreed. "But what do you make of the more sharply defined streaks, separated by the deep crease?"

I referred to two long, dark smears of about uniform length and breadth with a sharp crease extending between them. The crease in spots nearly severed the fiber of the paper.

The Chief snatched up a loose sheet of paper and creased it with his thumb nail. The effect was similar, only by no means as pronounced.

"I have it!" he nervously cried. And he jerked the spear from the bronze Norseman and fitted the blade in between the smears. There was no doubt as to the correctness of his discovery; the assassin had used the will in wiping the blood off the blade of the spear.

"Whoever killed Mr. Dustin took time to wipe the mortal weapon," murmured the Chief. "It might be expected that he would be in such a hurry to escape that he'd neglect any such precaution. But no; he not only cleaned the spear and replaced it in the statuette but he also lingered to ransack the desk. The latter move puzzles me a trifle, I'll admit."

"Unless he overhauled the drawer before killing Mr. Dustin," I suggested.

"That would mean he was alone in the room," mumbled Mr. Butterworth. "It isn't quite clear—yet."

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"But you said the finding of the will would supply the last piece that's necessary to complete your puzzle picture," I said reproachfully.

He walked to the window and stared out thoughtfully across the lawns, his brows creased with little wrinkles. When he faced about, his face was smiling, his eyes shining as if inspired; and he softly said:

"I think I can keep my promise. Things begin to clear up. The theory of the desk having been ransacked before the mortal blow was struck has left a deep impression on my mind. I hope I can accept it as a part of the picture. But call Backus in; I see him on the lawn."

I attracted the man's attention, and after he had entered, Mr. Butterworth earnestly demanded, "Can I trust you to do as I tell you?"

"Yes, sir. Certainly, sir," readily replied Backus.

"Then take up your station outside of Cromb's house early tomorrow morning and follow him when he comes out. If he goes to town, follow him. If he enters a building, keep at his heels. Don't let him get out of your sight. It won't make much difference if he sees you're following him."

"I'll do it," promised Backus, and his eye glittered as if the task were to his liking.

"That's all," concluded Mr. Butterworth. "I'll speak to Miss Hayes so she'll know where you are. You needn't take up the watch till tomorrow morning."

"Now why that particular bit of business?" I asked; for if he wanted a man trailed there were men in town long used to the work.

"I'm simply trying an experiment," he smiled. "We lose nothing by it and I hope to gain much. Where have the young folks gone to?"

We started to find them, but had barely reached the door when Miss Hayes, half supported by Ashley's arm, staggered through the door. The faces of both were drawn and white.

"John—my brother!" was all she could articulate.

"Good Heavens, sir! He's down cellar! The cook found him there!" gasped Ashley, reeling like a drunken man.

For a moment Mr. Butterworth remained motionless, his mien suggesting he was partly stunned by the information. Suddenly he barked rather than asked:

"Does any one else know he's here? Can you trust the cook?"

"She's loyal—she won't tell," choked Miss Hayes, falling into a chair.

"No one else knows," added Ashley.

"Then obey me," snarled the Chief. "Miss Hayes, get the Falow girl upstairs and keep her there. Keep her away from the windows. You look deathly sick. Tell her you're ill and have her assist you to your room. Jethuel, write a message to the office—anything so long it's an excuse to send Backus on the run to the telegraph office. Hustle him. Ashley, bring Hayes here after Miss Hayes has gone upstairs."

We sped away on our errands, and by the time I had scribbled a meaningless message to the office and had seen Backus off to the telegraph office on the run I took time to speculate on why young Hayes should be in Rhinehill and what the Chief would do with him.

By the time I returned to the study Miss Hayes had disappeared upstairs and Mr. Butterworth had brought the car to the side entrance. We entered the house together, he carrying a long yellow coat, cap and goggles. We had barely gained the study when the hall door opened and Ashley entered, leading young Hayes.

HAYES was dressed in greasy overalls and a cheap, checked cotton shirt, without a collar, and was worn to the bone. All in all he was very disreputable in appearance.

"They spotted me when I quit the boat to mail the letter to Ruth," he cried. "If I hadn't shaved off my beard——"

"Shut up and get into this coat and help me break the law," interrupted the Chief, throwing the coat on him. "The cap! Pull it well down. Where are the goggles? Here! Slip them on. Now you're my chauffeur. You're to drive me home. I'll give the necessary road directions from the back seat."

"But can he drive a car?" I anxiously broke in.

"Sure," eagerly cried Hayes, straightening. "It's mighty decent of you to do this——"

"Enough! Get into the car and hunch over the wheel," the Chief cut in. "I'll follow." Then to me and Ashley—

"Return to town together." And he hastened into the hall and out to the car.

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Soon we heard the machine purring down the road.

"In Heaven's mercy, what'll happen next?" shivered Ashley, throwing himself on to a couch.

"We'll all be arrested if you don't brace up," I told him sharply. "What did Hayes mean by 'quitting the boat?' Has he been playing the stowaway?"

"No. He's been stoking on a boat between New York and Liverpool. I only got snatches of it. It gets by me!"

It got by me, too, except as I decided it looked mighty cloudy for the young man. Nor could I see how it would profit the case to have the Chief keep him in hiding for a few days. He must face the charges the Grand Jury was about to bring against him, and it wasn't customary for the old Bureau to aid and abet an alleged criminal to escape.

When we reached town the newsies were yelling their extras, and buying papers we hurried to the office. The accounts were brief, but to the point. John Hayes had concealed himself ever since the murder by posing as a stoker on one of the transatlantic liners.

His boat had been searched on touching at Liverpool directly after the murder, but none of the detectives had thought of investigating the men in the engine room. He had lived on board nearly all the time—something like a month—and had never been suspected till he shaved off his beard and disembarked to mail a letter.

While ashore in New York and returning from mailing the letter he was observed by one of the pier officials, who was struck by the contrast between his grimy attire and his clean, close-shaven features. With the rough beard off his features looked too refined and intelligent for a stoker.

With suspicion aroused and his published likeness recalled to mind the detective bureau was soon on his trail. The account failed to state whether the detectives sighted their game, or whether he suspected he was being followed and broke away before the actual alarm was sounded.

Nor was it explained how he managed to escape from the city and make up the river. But it was told how his trail had been picked up and lost several times, all the accounts concluding with the assertion he was making for Rhinehill and would surely be captured before nightfall. Well, I wondered.

CHAPTER X

THE PICTURE IS COMPLETED

ALTHOUGH I have witnessed many a dramatic finale staged in the office of the Bureau of Abnormal Litigation, that particular morning will always remain memorable. Mr. Butterworth began the day with interviewing Miss Hayes, Mary Falow and Ashley in his private office, one at a time. Just as he was finishing with the artist, Chapel, in answer to a telephone communication of the preceding evening, arrived together with the man Dunbar.

As we entered the private office Chapel surveyed the silent trio in frank surprise. I think he was warned by the Chief's vibrant greeting that he was about to hear what vaudeville performers are fond of styling "big stuff."

"Why are we here?" demanded Chapel. "Have you learned anything new about John Hayes?" And he scrutinized the Chief shrewdly.

"Let the mode of procedure be orderly," replied Mr. Butterworth. "I invited you here to witness my attempts to put together the little puzzle picture I've been fussing over for several weeks. I'm expecting Mr. Cromb. He'll be here soon."

Chapel searched the downcast faces for a clue, while Dunbar hitched about nervously. There was nothing to be learned from the averted face of Miss Hayes nor from the studious indifference of the artist. Mary Falow's red eyes and constrained bearing were more promising, yet offered nothing tangible.

The Chief consulted his watch, tilted back in his chair and stared pensively from the window. Five minutes passed in this fashion and the Assistant District Attorney was beginning to catch Dunbar's fidgets when the buzzer sounded on the desk telephone and the Chief loudly called:

"All right. Come in."

The door opened to admit John Hayes.

With a sharp exclamation Dunbar jumped to his feet and was about to lay hands on Hayes when the Chief warned:

"Keep back, Dunbar! Don't be impatient. You'll have an opportunity to take your man in charge in due season."

Dunbar scowled and turned to Chapel for instructions. The Assistant District Attorney motioned him back to his chair and asked—

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"Can't we get down to business, Mr. Butterworth?"

"I had intended to wait for Mr. Cromb," said the Chief, "but he'll doubtless show up before we've finished. Mr. Chapel, I've not asked you here to listen to what the inquest and your own researches have made known. Rather, I desire you to have an opportunity to learn certain facts heretofore kept in the background. I've talked with the witnesses and have urged them to refresh their recollections. I believe you'll be interested. Miss Hayes, will you please state anything you've failed to divulge until now?"

Miss Hayes rested her gaze on the Assistant District Attorney's frowning face and quietly began:

"I've testified before the Coroner that I did not meet my brother on that night. That was untrue. When I was in the living-room, listening to the loud voices in the library, I was surprised to see John ascending the stairs, his traveling-bag in his hand as though he was about to retire.

"I couldn't understand why he should leave Mr. Ashley alone with grandfather. I was worried. I returned to the veranda undecided what to do. Then I concluded I ought to seek out my brother and obtain an explanation. When I returned to the reception hall he had returned from upstairs and was about to depart. He had his suitcase in one hand and his traveling-bag in the other.

"I spoke to him and asked why he was going. His answer was vague and unsatisfactory. He said something about Mr. Ashley waiting for him and that he must return to town and was unable to give me any explanation. He said grandfather had been unreasonable and that he was going to 'drop out of sight for a spell.'

"He absolutely refused to enlighten me, and I gave up in despair, only begging him to return and bid grandfather good-by in the proper spirit. He did so and I returned to the veranda, and cried a bit.

"On another occasion, when Mr. Butterworth was examining the collection and had discovered the shattered Chelsea vase was a counterfeit——"

"Counterfeit?" exclaimed Chapel.

"Exactly. Please proceed, Miss Hayes," smoothly prompted the Chief.

"On that occasion I lied and pronounced a Louis XV inkstand to be genuine when I knew it was an imitation," bravely confessed Miss Hayes. "When Mr. Butterworth's assistant visited the house and I knew Mr. Cromb was in the library, having gained admission with his private key to the side door, I told another falsehood, declaring no one but the servants and myself were in the house. He discovered Mr. Cromb, who explained he was there at my request, searching for the lost will. I did not deny this, as I feared Mr. Cromb might say something that would harm either my brother or Mr. Ashley. I think that's all."

"And very interesting," grimly murmured Chapel, making notes rapidly. "It's unfortunate you failed to give this evidence when on the witness stand under oath. You confess, Miss Hayes, to having committed perjury."

"She confesses on my advice and I do not think the perjury charge will be pressed by your office," smiled the Chief. "Mr. Ashley, while you have but little to say, Mr. Chapel may deem it important."

The artist moistened his lips and stated, "When John Hayes joined me in the machine—for I did not enter the house, although Miss Hayes believed I did—he came out the side and not the front door."

Before Chapel could comment on this admission there came a rap on the door and Cromb, angry of mien, stamped in, closely followed by Backus. For a moment he was taken aback on beholding the group. Then he wrathfully charged:

"Mr. Butterworth, you're the man who set this fellow to dogging my steps. I told you I'd be here, and refusing to believe me you've had me trailed all the morning. I don't know what you're up to, but if there's any law in the land——"

"Lots of it, Mr. Cromb; lots of it," pleasantly interrupted the Chief. "Calm yourself and help us to put the puzzle together. We've been confessing everything while waiting for you. John Hayes, please tell your story, beginning with your arrival from Europe."

Hayes, now dressed more decently but very haggard of face, squared his shoulders and readily complied, Chapel taking notes most industriously:

"I arrived from Europe with only a few dollars in my pocket. My friend Ashley met me at the pier and took me to his rooms. I told him I was nearly out of funds, and like the good chap he is he want-

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ed to loan me money. I refused his offer and explained I'd written my grandfather that I was coming home and should need financial assistance.

"We motored up to Rhinehill and at the last minute he decided not to enter the house, fearing there might be a disagreeable scene. He went with me as far as the door and said he'd wait in the car till my interview terminated. If all was pleasant I was to summon him and we'd spend the night there."

Miss Ruth caught her breath and glanced thankfully toward the Chief.

"Grandfather at first was very crusty with me," continued Hayes. "He talked at some length about my roaming habits and said he proposed to see that I got enough of wandering before he died. He said he could cut me off without a penny and would do so if he believed I'd planned on spending his money in Europe. He said I was nothing but a loafer till I could prove myself independent of all aid.

"That roiled me, and I retorted that in as much as he'd called me a loafer I proposed to show him I could make good without any help and at the same time indulge my liking for travel. He laughed at this boast and lost the edge of his temper. He said: 'I've got five hundred dollars in the desk for you. I'll cater to your wandering habits this once. Take the money and travel till it's gone. Then come back and settle down to business.'

"But I was still provoked and repeated that I was self-dependent and would take none of his money so long as I believed it was begrudged me. He warned me that if I refused the money but borrowed of my sister he would cut me off without a penny. I lost my head when he intimated I'd rook Ruth out of her money and told him I had sand and muscle enough to work my way. This pleased him. I can't recall ever seeing him in better humor than when I announced my ability to pay my own way. He asked me how I would do it.

"On the spur of the moment I recklessly answered that I'd go as stoker if no other way opened. My answer seemed to make a deep impression on him, and he quietly said: 'John, if you've guts enough to do that I'll take back all I've said and beg your pardon into the bargain. You're welcome to the five hundred. Will you take it, or stick to your words?'

"Pride held me up to the scratch and I coldly said I would stand my hand. He then produced the will and showed me I was to come in for half of the estate, and solemnly declared that despite his threats he had never entertained the slightest desire to disinherit me."

"EXHIBIT A—the Dustin will," broke in Mr. Butterworth, tossing the blood-stained paper into Chapel's lap. Chapel grabbed it, his eyes bulging. Hayes resumed:

"He was very mellow, for him, and insisted I remain all night. He even seemed pleased to know Ashley was with me. I shall always regret I didn't meet him in the same frame of mind; but I had bound myself to a disagreeable task and wanted to be off and have the ordeal done with. Renewing my promise to borrow no money from Ruth or any one else, I left him rather abruptly, passing into the hall and picking up my luggage. You've heard how Ruth met me at the door and prevailed on me to return to the library and shake hands with him. He was much touched by my return and followed me to the side door——"

"Why the side door?" snapped Chapel.

"Because I was beginning to melt a bit and felt more decent toward my grandfather. I wanted to get away, for I knew if I met Ruth again I might show some emotion. I joined Ashley and we returned to town. On the way I foolishly stood up and was thrown against the glass windshield, breaking it and cutting my fingers.

"I left the handbag with Ashley and went to a hotel. I had enough money to pay for my lodgings and to buy some cheap clothes. Early in the morning I purchased some cheap shirts, some cheap trousers and a pair of overalls. I changed my clothes in my room, placing my discarded garments in the suitcase."

"A moment," halted Chapel. "How did you manage to check your case and leave the hotel, while dressed as a laborer, without attracting attention?"

"I had saved out my light overcoat and wore it," explained Hayes. "With the collar turned up not much of my other clothes showed. I sold the coat in a second-hand clothing store on my way to the pier. I hired out as stoker and sailed at eleven o'clock that morning. It was——hot down in the engine room and I toppled over

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more'n once before I could stand my stint.

"But I stuck to it. I never read a newspaper, or associated with any of the other stokers, as it was my wish to keep my identity effectually concealed. I went under the name of Ronald Roake. I didn't know anything about the murder till my return trip. It upset me. I was practically accused of the crime and had no defense.

"I mailed the check to my suitcase to Ruth, fearing it might turn up and reveal the fact I'd changed my appearance. The moment I dropped the letter into the box I was sorry, for I feared it would get Ruth into trouble. On the next return trip I shaved off my beard, was suspected, ran away, escaped, and have been in hiding till called here this morning."

It was exceedingly interesting to watch the various faces as Hayes told his story. Cromb's expression defied analysis, while Miss Ruth was weeping softly from sheer joy.

The Chief picked up a sheet of foolscap, and, beaming genially over his spectacles, said:

"I haven't had a chance to talk with Mr. Cromb apart, and perhaps it would save time and answer all purposes if I briefly narrate the things he hasn't made public. If I err he can correct me. To lead off with, he hasn't told that he was in the Dustin house on the night of the homicide."

Chapel stiffened and Cromb grew white to his lips, and Backus edged in between him and the door.

"The second important fact concealed by Mr. Cromb is his imitation of various valuable antiques in the Dustin collection. I have mentioned the broken Chelsea vase, my first clue to the puzzle; it was his handiwork. On the night of the homicide, Cromb visited Mr. Dustin, bringing with him the fake vase in a black bag."

Chapel softly smote the arm of his chair with his fist, and his suspicious face now radiated nothing but admiration for my employer.

"He was in the study when Hayes entered the library," the Chief continued. "Mr. Dustin did not mind his presence any more than he would have minded the presence of a private secretary or a servant, and did not inform his grandson that they were not alone. The draperies in the archway were snugly drawn. Cromb decided it was an excellent opportunity to substitute the imitation for the genuine and he did so.

"Bag in hand, he then passed into the reception hall. Instead of quitting the house by the front door he dropped his bag and for some reason returned to the library door. By the way, Cromb, why didn't you leave by the front door?"

Cromb moistened his dry lips, his forehead wet with sweat, and weakly explained, "Ashley was in front in the car."

"How stupid of me!" cried the Chief. "Anyway, he heard voices close to the library door and in something of a panic returned to the stairs, snatched up what he believed to be his grip——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Chapel, again smiting the arm of the chair.

"In reality the bag belonging to Hayes," chuckled the Chief. "I now offer Exhibit B—the black bag left in the Dustin house by Hayes, as we can identify it beyond all question; just as we can prove the bag now in your possession, Mr. Chapel, was sold by the Rhinehill dealer to Cromb several months ago."

And the Chief dragged the bag from under the desk and pushed it toward the Assistant District Attorney. Then he continued:

"It was Cromb whom Miss Ruth saw going upstairs and thought to be her brother. At the head of the stairs was Mary Falow. We'll now allow Miss Falow to explain a bit."

The domestic gripped her hands tightly together and in the same jerky monotone as that which had characterized her testimony in the inquest began:

"When Mr. Cromb came upstairs I was surprised and quickly knew he did not care to be seen there. He asked me if he could pass out the back way and I was pleased to help him. He was worried about the bag and asked if I could keep it for him a day or so in my room. I was pleased to have him trust me and took it from him.

"I led him through the upper hall to the back hall and set the bag in my room. We heard a door close below—the side door. We looked out and he said something about Ashley; said it was queer he should leave by the side door while Hayes went out the front door. He wanted me to swear before the Grand Jury that I saw Ashley leave by the side door after Mr. Hayes left by the front. He said he couldn't tell it, as he

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didn't want any one to know he was upstairs that night. I couldn't do it."

"Why?" demanded Chapel.

The domestic remained silent, and the Chief kindly said:

"It's better to tell it here than in a crowded court room. Let me help you. Wasn't it because you believed you were in love with Cromb and feared he was in love with Miss Hayes? Wasn't that the reason why you were unwilling to say anything which would drive Ashley, whom you believed Miss Hayes preferred, out of the race?"

She bowed her head and barely whispered her answer, an affirmative. Mr. Butterworth consulted his paper and continued, "You escorted Cromb to the back door and saw him leave the house?"

"I did."

"Some time later you took the black bag to his house at his request?"

"I did."

"Before doing so you examined its contents and found the fountain pen and retained it in your possession?"

"I didn't think it any harm. It was pretty——"

"We understand," said the Chief. "You were in Cromb's house the night he was assaulted. You've told me you assaulted him. Is that true?"

"It is not. I didn't dare tell the truth."

Cromb was lost in amazement during this recital, but he did not offer to contradict the maid.

"Who gave you the money with which you bought the expensive dresses, hats and shoes in your trunk?" asked the Chief.

"I refuse to tell," she replied.

"Why were you up and about the house so late on the night of the homicide?" quietly persisted the Chief.

"I've already refused to tell you. I refuse now," she replied.

The Chief did not seem disappointed, although Chapel was chafing impatiently. Mr. Butterworth suddenly digressed to say, "Here is Exhibit C—the mortal weapon."

And he produced from beneath the desk the statuette, heavily wrapped in brown paper. Removing the wrappings, he set the bronze on his desk and removed the spear and passed it over to the astounded Chapel. Again diving beneath the desk, he brought forth another package, this time the linen duster, and handing it over, informed the Assistant District Attorney—

"Exhibit D — Nathan Cromb's duster, drenched with blood and found in a rubbish barrel back of the Dustin house."

"I found it!" broke in Backus proudly.

"Take him in charge!" thundered Chapel, pointing to the white-faced Cromb.

"Not yet!" sternly cried Mr. Butterworth. "Would you abuse the confidence I've placed in you?"

"I beg your pardon," mumbled Chapel, motioning Dunbar back. "But why prolong this scene? Who assaulted Cromb? Who gave the maid money to spend on this fine raiment you mention, and why was the maid at the head of the stairs so late at night? If you can't make her tell, I believe I can."

THE Chief swept his gaze slowly about the circle of strained faces and slowly asked—

"James Backus, why did you kill your master?"

It was so entirely unexpected that Chapel and Dunbar, Miss Hayes and Ashley, Hayes and myself, plus Cromb, sat for several seconds with mouths agape. Backus displayed less emotion than any of us.

"I'm waiting, Backus," the Chief sternly reminded him.

"'Fore God, I didn't go for to do it," whispered Backus, mopping his brow and stepping closer to the desk. "I'll tell everything. I've kept company with Mary Falow ever since she's been at the Dustin place. She was always reading books about fine ladies what marry above their station. She was always wanting money to spend on gee-gaws.

"I give her most all of my wages, but there come a time when I couldn't give her enough. The day it happened she talked mighty rough, saying she hadn't any use for a man what couldn't dress his woman well. I was angry and said I'd git the money.

"I knew Mr. Dustin had got five hundred out the bank. I planned to steal it. I got permission to be away overnight, but Mary suspected and was worried. I wanted her to worry and suffer, 'cause I was doing it for her and I didn't think she was thankful for what I'd already done.

"I sneaked in the side door and was in the little hall when Cromb slipped out the study into the reception room. I hid behind a cabinet, 'cause I heard voices in the

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library. Cromb's duster was on the back of a chair. I used it in covering my face and shoulders.

"I s'posed Mr. Dustin and Mr. Hayes would quit the library together, going upstairs. Instead of that Mr. Hayes passed through the study within two feet of me, Mr. Dustin following him. Then I thought I had my chance. All I had to do was to step into the library, get the money and run out into the reception hall, upstairs to the rear of the house and outdoors.

"But I couldn't find the money at first, even after I'd dumped everything out the desk drawer. Then I found it and was making for the door when Mr. Dustin come in. The table was between us and I was crouching low. He held a vase in his hands and was taking on very hard, saying some one had 'tricked him.' Then he threw the vase against the shelf under the library table, smashing it to pieces.

"As he done so he seen me. I had the duster over my head and hoped to git away without his recognizing me. I made a break for the door just as he jumped 'round the table. My foot caught against something and down I went, clawing at the pedestal to save myself. The bronze statter fell with me and Mr. Dustin fell atop of us, the spear jabbing him in the throat and killing him. It was awful! I tried to clean the spear with a paper I picked off the table, and then rolled the statter to one side. Then I went out the side door and rammed the duster into the rubbish barrel. Then I dug out. It was an accident, sir, and may God forgive me!"

"And later you went to Cromb's house in the night and made Mary return home with you. While there you assaulted Cromb," the chief of the Bureau of Abnormal Litigation quickly interjected.

"I hit him good and hard, and only wish he was dead instead of the master," muttered Backus.

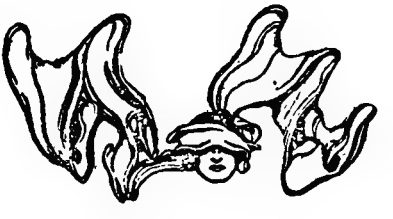
You could have knocked any of us over with a blade of grass when he finished this frenzied confession. You certainly have to take your hats off to the Chief when he settles into the harness and begins putting puzzle pictures together. What I admired as much as anything was his way of insuring Backus' presence in the office without alarming his suspicions. He knew he was jealous of Cromb on account of the girl and would delight in dogging him.

"At the time of the actual killing," summed up Mr. Butterworth, "Cromb was upstairs with the domestic, or had just quit the house. Hayes was getting into the auto, or had just driven away. Miss Hayes was on the veranda. And I believe that's all, except minor details which will be furnished at the District Attorney's convenience."

Dunbar slipped up to Backus and took him in charge.

CROMB is openly a counterfeiter of antiques in Paris. Mary Falow lives with the Ashleys, waiting for Backus to serve his sentence, desiring only to make up in some measure for the past by remaining loyal to him. Thanks to Mr. Butterworth, the Court held that his presence in the house could not constitute a felony, as he had the right of a trusted servant to come and go as he pleased.

This inhibited any charge of murder, as there was no reason to question his version of the killing. The jury wrangled twelve hours and compromised on manslaughter; and if he's a model prisoner he'll be released at the end of twelve years and some months. Rather a long time to wait; but Mary has entirely changed her nature and holds herself to be equally to blame with him, and evidently intends to stick by him.



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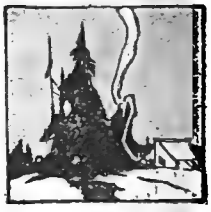
THE CAMP-FIRE

A MEETING-PLACE FOR READERS, WRITERS AND ADVENTURERS



HUGH PENDEXTER and Talbot Mundy both live in the same little town in Maine. Consequently said town has two novelettes to its credit in this issue of the magazine. I take particular interest in this fact because I introduced Mr. Mundy to both Maine and Mr. Pendexter. Talbot Mundy has been pretty well over Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia. He is English, as you know. Last Summer he joined me in camp in Maine. He arrived after dark. In the morning he took one long breath of Maine air, one long look at a Maine lake and Maine woods, and announced: "This is God's country! I'm going to live here!"

A few days later, at our earnest solicitation, Hugh Pendexter came up from the coast where he was spending the Summer and dropped in for the night. Once a newspaperman in New York, he, too, had been won to Maine, and I knew he was familiar with the whole State and could give valuable information as to the very best part of it to settle in. The three of us sat around the fire that night and he proceeded to prove that he had himself settled down in the very best spot in all Maine. Talbot Mundy has now been living in that spot for the better part of a year.

IT WAS up there that *Dick Anthony of Arran* was born. Who is *Dick Anthony of Arran?* All of you are going to meet him next month. He is *the* adventurer. Stow his name away in your mind—*Dick Anthony of Arran.* Talbot Mundy has written a series of stories about him, and the first of them appears in the next issue.

I TOLD you Gordon McCreagh showed me the medal, or rather belt-buckle, referred to below. It is all he pictures it. It doesn't enter into his story in this issue, except by way of showing he knows something about the fight game, but here is how he won it:

Once upon a time I came into the town of Mandalay—which Kipling *didn't* see and wrote a song about. I was broke to the world, as had happened to me before; and the only possible money in sight was an elimination contest for no less an event than the "Championship of All Upper Burma" which a local fan who hoped to establish a reputation as a swell sport had organized.

There was to be a belt and a purse of three hundred rupees. Let me say right here that the noble art in the Far East is on a scale which would here be designated as tenth rate. Even at that, "my liver turned all into water," as the natives idiomatically express it, when I contemplated the suicide.

However, in the dim past I had represented my school in the Public Schools competition at Aldershot, and I had kept it up as opportunity offered, *and* I had been living as hard as wire nails for over a year—*and* I needed three hundred rupees awful bad.

THE other entrants were about as professional as I was—a couple of hard nuts from the railway yards, a few soldiers, and a Barbados negro—only a lightweight, but the best man of the lot.

The contest, as I have said, was one of elimination—I was the one nearly eliminated. The massacre lasted a week, and I nearly died; but by the special dispensation of Providence, the man who should have won, a big cannibal of a gunner, strained his shoulder trying to kill the man who would have got it next; and, God being good, the loot came to me.

I will show you the belt some day—a weird creation, but honest-to-goodness silver, pompously engraved, and with a wondrous design on it in high relief, which to the fervid imagination of the native craftsman represented a lifelike delineation of a knockout.

HAROLD TITUS got the "makings" for his story in this issue from a friend in Rio Blanco County, Colorado. And, in accordance with our custom, Mr. Titus rises in his place and gives an account of himself along with the appearance of his first story in the magazine:

I'm the fellow who, the morning after, is greeted with something like the following: "Oh, you should 'a' been along last night! There'll never be another like it. While George was building a fire under one corner of City Hall, Hank went an' joined the Army, Steve licked a car-conductor on the way home, and Artie showed up just now with a policeman's helmet and night-stick. Seem's though you're always missing when a classic is staged." And so it is!

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I WAS born and brought up here in western Michigan in time to see something of big lumbering; naturally, I became somewhat familiar with the Great Lakes. I managed to stay around the University of Michigan until people wondered how I did it, and had my inning at the newspaper game in Detroit, serving the *News* there. I've followed burros in Arizona, and taken a look-in at the cow business in Colorado, knocked around Pacific Coast water-fronts, and managed a fruit farm, and at every turn adventure has passed me by—that is, anything that I would brand as adventure. Of course, I got a few thrills as a newspaper reporter, I've been a little hungry and a little thirsty, and a couple of times have wondered how it would all turn out, but none of it has ever appealed to me as anything but the happenings in the natural run of things.

FOR two years I have tangoed with the fiction game and like it, treacherous as is the way. I'm going to keep on, beating this "mill" part of the time, fighting codling-moth and shothole fungus Summers, and all I ask by way of diversion is an occasional stretch of country—not much, sixty miles or so—with a string of lavender-and-mauve buttes up against an unravished sky as a background. Maybe big snow and steers and a bunk-house stove that's red-hot once in a while—or Lake Michigan under a norther.

I have found the "Camp-Fire" most interesting reading, and I admire the men who can live for that stuff alone. However, I am not among the chosen. Just one bit of gun-play with a human as the object has been my intimate experience. In this, comes a name that is probably familiar to at least some of the true Adventurers—Major Joseph L. Kraemer, who was more than a few times in the thin line of men that wormed through a Philippine jungle. Joe was head of the art department of the Detroit *News* when I was a reporter there.

ONE morning we were sent over to police court on a story that promised to make good stuff. An Armenian physician had caused the arrest of his wife and his nephew the night before. He sat in the court-room, waiting the arraignment of the pair. I stood with my back to him. Joe was against the wall, behind the young defendant and the woman. The case was called; wife and nephew stood up and then comes friend physician, one hand full of voluble gun. Panic, stampede, scrap for possession of the weapon, which continued to talk until empty. The nephew was done for—never had a chance. I was, to put it with superlative mildness, surprised, for the shooting had started right over my shoulder—and in a court-room.

When they had the doctor fast and while the panic was at its best, I looked for Joe. He was standing up where the judge should have been, lighting a cigarette. "And he handled it like a Roman candle!" he called to me. I later found that Kraemer had grabbed the woman, fought with her and thrown her into a jury-room out of range, before moving out of the line of fire himself. He was more or less dusted with plaster, and the crown of the woman's hat had been torn out by a bullet.

IN RESPONSE to the many inquiries we have prepared full data on the Adventurers' Club which will be sent on request. I think you all know that the Adventurers' Club and our "Camp-Fire" are entirely different matters, the latter being open to any one with the spirit of adventure in him. The Club has no connection with the magazine, though most of us are in sympathy with its spirit and purpose.

CARL M. CHAPIN—"The Trouble Company" in this number—says:

I am possessed of a perfectly marvelous aptitude for arriving on the scene just in time to watch the white-wings sweeping up the splinters. Even in my best-beloved line, the firemen of several cities say they know to a certainty when I'm in town by the impenetrable coyness that seizes the tappers.

But we'll all admit that he has the "inside dope" on firemen and fires. And both are worth knowing about.

ANOTHER new member joins the Camp-Fire family in this issue—Thomas Addison, with the first of the *Come-on Charley* stories. I find it infernally hard not to open up and say what I think about these *Come-on Charley* stories, but the "Camp-Fire" is not the place for that kind of thing and I'll keep it for "The Trail Ahead" and for page 2.

Anyhow you'll want to get acquainted with Thomas Addison, and he with you, so here he stands up among you and gives an account of himself:

My adventures have been confined principally to crowded city streets. I haven't been to the South Seas, Alaska, or out-of-the-way places. I have hunted and fished from Maine to Florida, but everybody does that. I have been in railroad wrecks, a train afire, and once was toppled off a mountainside by an o'nery mule down in Alabama. When I came to—fully—I was in Tennessee on the way to Cincinnati. I was headed that way from a hunting-trip when the mule got gay.

I HAVE never been shipwrecked, but once in the Ashley River above Charleston I was dragged out for drowned from under a catboat, and it was two hours before I could tell why I tried to sail that boat when I didn't know the stern sheets from the peak halyards. But I guess that's the way I learned. Naturally—or I should say, by nature—I am a careful sort of person, and for this reason, I imagine, adventure of the hair-raising variety has never overtaken me. I sidestepped when I saw it coming.

Yet, on the other hand, I have had adventures in the so-called peaceful haunts of men that have helped to make me bald. I was born in the South, reared in the North, and have poked my nose into many European cities. This implies the possession of money. Yes, I knew what it looked like in days gone by; but now I can not even tell it by the smell.

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It is not that that essential sense has lost its proper functions—it's the other thing that is lost. But let me hurry on.

MY ADVENTURES in this country have come to me in the line of work—reporting for the newspapers. Arson, burglary, murder and just plain graft have been the meat I have been nourished on, reportorially speaking. I have interviewed diplomats and "dips" (they vary only in degree), mayors and "molls," Congressmen and "con" men, judges, jugglers, lawyers, thieves, and on down the scale of human life to politicians and the police. From each and all I have gained some queer insights into the workings of what we call the mind.

In Europe I looked upon a king, and lived. I also gazed at a queen, and was sad. Beneath their trappings they seemed so feeble and ineffectual. I have seen other kings and queens that have gladdened me till the other fellow showed something better and more winning. I have sat at the roulette and *trente-et-quarante* tables at Monte Carlo with a sure-enough duchess on one side of me and a poor devil from New Orleans on the other. In the morning the poor devil was found lying in the gardens alongside of what brains he had, and the duchess, I presume, could have been found at the same hour snoring in her bed. I saw the one and rejoice that I didn't see the other; she was fat, and a long way over forty.

IN CORSICA, not twenty miles from Bastia, I was "captured" by what I learned afterward was a sure-enough brigand, but who I thought had escaped from Hammerstein's chorus, and eluded death by the payment of two hundred francs and sundry trinkets, which was all I had about me, and which I considered cheap salvation when I compared it with the price I myself would set upon my head.

I WAS cheated in Rome, robbed in Vienna, buncoed in Paris, and swindled in London, like ten thousand thousand others of my dearly beloved countrymen; and from every one of these experiences I can draw at will and place on paper in some such fashion that may beguile a nodding editor to write a check for.

I guess that's all I have to say. About myself personally there is nothing of special interest. I have no scars received in battle—nothing visible. I have certain scars that certain ladies are responsible for, received in numerous disastrous encounters at seashore, mountainside and other popular resorts, but no physical examiner has ever discovered them, and I will not air them now. I will end by saying that I am young enough to crack nuts with my teeth and old enough not to do it, and I am as handsome as any man anywhere who looks like me.

HERE is the brief explanation of our identification-cards. They are offered free of charge to any of you. All we ask is that you comply carefully with the simple directions as they appear below in italics:

The cards bear this inscription, printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of ADVENTURE, New York, U. S. A., stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. The names and addresses will be treated as confidential by us. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for purposes of business identification. Later, arrangements may perhaps be made for money deposits to cover cable or telegraph notifications. Cards furnished free of charge, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application. Send no applications without the two names and two addresses in full.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later, for the cost of manufacture, we may furnish, instead of the above cards, a card or tag of aluminum, proof against heat, water and general wear and tear, for adventurers when actually in the jungle, desert, etc.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give the two names and addresses in full when applying.*

I'M ALWAYS nervous about quoting anything from Dwight L. Loughborough, for he has an unholy horror of seeming to seek publicity—and he a newspaperman! So I have to pass by a good many things I'd like to give you. But fortunately Mr. Loughborough is an especially enthusiastic member of the Camp-Fire and more than ready to contribute anything that might interest you, provided he himself is left out of it.

It's the only thing I've ever wanted to quarrel with him about, but I can't make him see that our Camp-Fire is a special sort of gathering where a man talks about himself only by way of our getting better acquainted all around and because the rest of us want to listen to him. However, that's his affair, not mine or yours, and certainly none of us can accuse him of lack of goodfellowship.

IN HIS story in this issue, truth and fiction are so closely dovetailed that it's hard to say where one stops and the other begins. I'd like to have seen that second baseball game—preferably from an airship. The big scout you have met before, and probably most American officers who served in the Philippines know the real man from whom he is drawn. The latter died over there—from an insignificant wound. He literally worried himself to death in hospital. Wanted to be out fighting "Gugus" again. Mr. Loughborough himself has been civilian scout, soldier and war correspondent, and knows the Far East and the South Seas at first hand.

IF YOU'VE found your man in "Lost Trails," please notify us and help make room for others.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

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WANTED —MEN

NOTE.—We offer this corner of the Camp-Fire, free of charge, to our readers. Naturally we can not vouch for any of the letters, the writers thereof, or any of the claims set forth therein, beyond the fact that we receive and publish these letters in good faith. We reserve the privilege of not publishing any letters or parts of a letter. Any inquiry for men sent to this magazine will be considered as intended for publication, at our discretion, in this department, with all names and addresses given therein printed in full, unless such inquiry contains contrary instructions. In the latter case we reserve the right to substitute for real names any numbers or other names. We are ready to forward mail through this office, but assume no responsibility therefor. **N.B.—Items asking for money rather than men will not be published.**

PARTNER to make a cycle trip from coast to coast. Object, adventure and see the country. Age 27. Would start in the early Spring. Prefer refined young man whom such a trip would benefit in health. Would follow a physical-culture plan and diet. Starting-point in the East. —Address No. W 231.

I LIVE away back in the mountains two days on horseback from the railroad. Am all alone; haven't got a relative on earth that I know of. Am 52 years, and lonesome; would like to hear from some young fellow. He must have some education and invest some money. I own a good piece of placer-mining ground and am boss of all the Indians in my part of the country. They don't know that the revolution is going on, and, as they haven't met up with many white men, they are honest and industrious. This is a good snap for the right boy; but he will have to look up his own adventures, as I am too busy. Besides, I have had my share, having lived in this country thirty years.—Address THOMAS TRACY, Paso del Macho, Mexico.

Inquiries for opportunities instead of men are NOT printed in this department.

AN ENGINEERING company with which I am connected owns an electrical instrument, run by dry batteries, that will indicate any kind of mineral or metal occurring in any considerable quantity, if it is carried over it. This instrument was invented by an expert electrician and has been under improvement and test for several years, and there is no question about it working. Tests of all kinds have been made. We would not sell or rent one of the instruments, though we may at some future time, but not until certain additional developments have been completed, that are now being carried forward by the best of electricians, for deep-mining purposes. In the meantime it is good to locate metal about six feet in the ground, rock, etc., and could be used to locate buried gold or silver. If any readers of the Camp-Fire have any definite record of such, it might be mutually profitable for them to write us.—Address GEORGE R. COLLINS, care Haldeman-Collins Engineering Co., 507 Westover Bridge, Kansas City, Mo.

Inquiries for opportunities instead of men are NOT printed in this department.

WANT a man to take a trip to South America. There are two of us and we are structural-iron workers. We expect to leave Philadelphia or New York in September or October, and we want to have a stake of $150 or $200 and expect third man to have the same. Object, taking up government land and prospecting.—Address JACK GEBHARDT, 3147 Washington Ave., St. Louis, Mo.

WOULD like a companion for a boat trip up the Orinoco and on to the Amazon in South America. Am a young fellow of twenty-two, and would like partner to be anywhere from seventeen to twenty-five. Have no special object besides taking pictures and general adventure.—Address H. R. WINFIELD, 2911 West 25th St., Cleveland, O.

FELLOW about 20 years old to join me in a world tour. Must be about 5 ft. 4, or 5 ft. 6; able to take care of himself. Preferably one who has "hoboed" some. (I have done a little myself.) Must speak some foreign language. I can speak French.—Address P. J. F., 344 E. 41st St., New York.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relatives Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

JACK HART (Baker), formerly 5th U. S. Cavalry. With me from Honolulu to Tahiti on schooner *Alex T. Brown.*—Address KARL BUHLER, 721 Folsom Street, San Francisco.

GEORGE W. LIGHTHOWLER. Formerly Lance-Corporal, B Squadron, 6 Inniskilling Dragoons at Mhow. Later working for W. Kavanagh, Upper Rawdon, Hants, N. S. News wanted.—Address F. C. HOWES, R. N. W. M. P., Arcola, Saskatchewan, Can.

GEN. CLIFF SANDS, Col. C. A. Morine (last heard of at Tilden, Butte County, via Cranville), W. E. Packard, W. E. Hammond, S. M. Clarck, R. F. Stoddord —all formerly of the Sands expedition. Write.—Address H. MILLER, Orcutt, Cal.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

RICHARD THOMAS NUGENT, supposed to be mining in Montana. Born at Wilmington, Ill., July 17, 1870. Black hair, brown eyes; 5 ft. 11; one arm injured. Not married. Last heard of in North Dakota. News gladly received by his loving sister.—Address MARY NUGENT JENKINS, Elk City, Okla.

MRS. MAUDE BAKER. Left Dallas in 1900 for Silver City, N. M. The trip was overland, and Mr. Durrett of the party could perhaps inform me as to her whereabouts. Her daughter inquiring.—Address No. L. T. 228.

BOATSWAIN'S MATE HOLYOKE, also Slim Lawler. Shipmates on the cruiser *Newark* in 1900, and in the Seymour relief expedition with me during the Boxer uprising in China, June, 1900. Have not heard of Holyoke since we parted in China, 1902. Last heard of Lawler in Brooklyn in 1902.—Address BURKE HANFORD, 323 E. Myrtle St., Hanford, Cal.

SHIRLEY M. PHILLPOT, Co. C, 10th U. S. Infantry, San Diego, Cal., 1891-93; discharged from Co. C, 15th Infantry, Fort Huachuca, Arizona, Dec. 12th, 1897, as first sergeant. Address wanted. Also Edward O'Flaherty, also at San Diego, Cal., 1891-93; discharged from Co. D, 16th Infantry, Huntsville, Alabama, as sergeant, Nov. 5, 1898.—Address WM. MCCARVER, Lock Box 5, Tillar, Arkansas.

JOHN HARDY, formerly of Kansas City and Omaha, whom I met in Liverpool, February, 1910. Last heard from in El Paso and reported going down into Mexico. News wanted by an old pal.—Address M. R. HARVELL, 134 Austin St., Cambridge, Mass.

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HARRY ELLIS, last heard from in Los Angeles, Cal. News wanted.—Address C. D. NELSON, Woodsville, N. H.

HOWARD PEPPER, last heard from in Mountain Home, Ore. Prospecter and miner. With Terry's Rough Riders during the Spanish-American War. Thunder Mountain Field, Idaho, about ten years ago; with a man named Shaw and one other, was interested in mine called the Copper King, in this same region, about that time. Just before or just after the death of Frank Tracey he was Deputy Sheriff of Washington County, Idaho. 40; 6 ft.; 190 pounds; sandy hair, and slight limp. News wanted by brother.—Address WADE PEPPER, 2108 Chapline St., Wheeling, W. Va.

JOE ASHTON or Jack Gillon, last heard of as quartermasters on the White Star Line, six or seven years ago. Also Charlie Kibble, Lester Clarke, the Wilson brothers of K. 8. Deal R. M. L. I. Youk would like to hear from some of the boys who were *it* during the Boer War. Also Charlie Anderson, last heard from in Hong Kong, 1906, or Nick Bond, who went to Africa with the 18th M. I.—Address WALTER B. JENNINGS, care Hudson Terminal Press, 30 Church Street, New York City.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

JOSEPH BENS, called "Jupp." 48; three years Berlin Garde, Feld-Artillerie; butcher. Sailed frequently from Antwerp and numerous European and Asiatic ports as cook. Missed him some years ago while on a Red Star Liner in Philadelphia. Last heard from Constantinople. Permanent address with a bureau or ship chandler in London, England, name forgotten, but Greek, like "Anagori Kiris."—Address FRITZ KLOECK, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Can.

DICK WOOLER. M. G. H., your friend and fellow passenger in 1906 to West Indies, whom you wrote to in Jamaica and Glasgow, would like to hear from you. I expect soon to come to Bermuda.—Address M. G. H., 322 West 11th St., Jacksonville, Fla.

ANDREW RICE, of Bath Co., Kentucky. Left home when about nineteen; was mate on a steamboat for about three years. Went to California in the gold rush in the early forties. Last heard from by his sister, Elizabeth Rice, in San Francisco. Information wanted by his sister.—Address CHARLIE HILL, Box 582, Richwood, West Virginia.

WILLIAM T. COTLER. Sailed from Liverpool, 1890, on *Lake Fisher*, merchantman, for Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. Information gladly received. Would also like to hear from Mrs. E. Drullard, last heard of in New York.—Address MRS. L. CALAMARI, Gen. Del., New York City, or D. COTTER.

HARVARD, '99. The Class Secretary would like very much to get in touch with the eleven men whose names are below. Francis V. Alexandre, John J. Colbert, Thornton S. Hardy, Charles McKey, Thomas S. R. Nelson, Walter J. Osborne, James M. Rogers, Jr., Ralph Slye, Harry St. C. Smith, Thomas H. Stack, William C. Thompson.—Address ARTHUR ADAMS, Room 615, 7 Water Street, Boston, Mass.

CHARLES McLAY. My brother. Last heard from May, 1904, from Plainview, Yorkton, Assiniboia, Saskatchewan, Canada. He left Glasgow about 1903, bought 640 acres and built a house there. I lost his address and did not write from 1904 till last year, when I wrote care Yorkton P. O., and got back answer, "Not found." I think he must be in some part of Canada as I have no reason to think him a quitter.—Address JOHN J. MCLAY, 5810 Lexington Ave., Cleveland, Ohio.

FRANK E. TIMMANUS, of Baltimore, whom I met in Buluwayo, S. A.; last heard of in Makirikiri, New Zealand. Also H. Litchfield of Palmerston, North N. Z., late of N. Z. M. R. Would like to hear from my old South African comrades.—Address A. H. GRICOURT, Box 472, Denver, Col.

WILLIAM BURNS, of Dubuque, Ia. About 23, white, tailor. Write "Buster," of Co. B.—Address HARRY R. BROWN, 905 So. State St., Chicago, Ill.

JAMES FEENEY, age 20. Left home September 20, 1912. Height 5 ft. 7 in.; light hair and complexion. First joint of right thumb missing, also scars on one of his ankles. Word wanted by mother.—Address MRS. FEENEY, 400 West 47th St., New York.

MICHAEL MURRAY, my father, late of Tralee, Ireland; married Barbara, daughter of George Oates, late of Gibraltar. Employed in Gibraltar prior to going to America in the seventies; heard of in New Orleans about 1906. If he has departed this life, will some friend kindly notify me and give me the address of his widow.—Address GEORGE HARRISON MURRAY, Box 410, Pretoria, South Africa.

FRANCIS BASIL SMITH, trooper in No. 17 Troop, South African Constabulary, a British Columbia corps that went to South Africa in April 1901. Transferred to Troop 9, Capt. Noel Money, and at the close of the war got a position on a Govt. Ry. survey in that country. Englishman, would now be 39; I have lost track of him for twelve years.—Address W. S. KEITH, 507-8 Railway Exchange Bldg., Portland, Oregon.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

JACK ATHERTON. Please write to your old pal of many years ago.—Address C. HARRY RAYMOND, 237 N. Pittsburgh St., Connellsville, Pa.

CUMLEY. Any one of that name please write me. I am the only man by the name living that I know of. My father was Alfred Cumley, born in Greene County, Pennsylvania, 1833.—Address J. W. CUMLEY, 920 Parallel St., Atchison, Kan.

JNO. F. COATES. Lived in Colorado, Ohio. Served in Spanish-American War; inventor of smoke-consumer. Write to C. B. L., care ADVENTURE.

COMRADES on full-rigged ship *Culzean*, 1875 to 1879; or gunboat *Bulldog*. Also Troop K, 6th U. S. Cav., Apache Campaigns 1881 to 1886.—Address GEORGE E. BROWNE-WICKHAM, Albuquerque, N. M.

BEB BLACK, alias "Big Nen." 6 ft. 3, very dark.—Address PETE BATTLE, 1130 15th St., Birmingham, Ala.

CHARLIE ROBERTSON. My son. Mulatto, 145 pounds, birthmark on cheek.—Address MRS. MARY BOYCE, 411 So. Cumberland St., Jackson, Tenn.

CARL SABIN (my brother), and Clayton Steele, late of U. S. N.—Address WILBUR SABIN, R. F. D. 1, Box 30, Shelley, Idaho.

HELEN BRECKENRIDGE ARHENS. Last heard of in Toronto, April, 1907.—Address MRS. M. M. SPIVEY, 357 Cobb St., Athens, Ga.

CLINT HOFFMAN, who stowed away with me on the iron bark *Closeburn* from Glasgow to Cape Town. I was then called Mike Reynolds.—Address MAX REYNOLDS, White Rats Club, 227 W. 46th St., N. Y.

CHARLEY REITMEIER (my brother), last traced to Dawson, 1906.—Address JOS. REITMEIER, care ADVENTURE.

CHARLES LOVETT, seaman. Left Weymouth, N. S., about 40 yrs. ago.—Address J. LOVETT, 6 Cogswell Ave., Bradford, Mass.

GEORGE A. HERON of U. S. S. *Vermont*.—Address ERICH TIETZE, care Haas, 28 West 38th Street, N. York.

CAPT. LORENZ LASSEN.—Address L. W. STEVENSON, Box 26, Cape Charles, Va.

J. J. McINTYRE of Brandon, Man., and late of Fargo, N. D. My brother.—Address FRANK J. MCINTYRE, 603 Fraser Ave., Edmonton, Alta.

ANTHONY BROOMS or his pal. Trappers.—Address J. CHATVAIRE, 301½ Columbus Ave., San Francisco, Cal.

MEN who served with U. S. forces during China Relief Expedition of 1900.—Address C. A. LOMAS, American Service School, 80 5th Ave., New York.

R. MACDONALD, in 18th British Hussars, 4th and 7th U. S. Cav. Also E. L. Davis, formerly of Winnipeg. Address VAL. J. MACKENNA, Gen. Del., Wahpeton, N. Dak.

MARTIN SERVIN, CAESAR VAN AUKER, or "DUCH" SEIGEL, please write.—Address MIKE DREBLIN, Gen. Del. or McCoy Hotel, El Paso, Tex.

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GEORGE A. KEENEY, alias White Rivers, supposed to be out West. Cook. Bad scar over left eye, also tongue split. Mother dead. Brice dying. Nice fortune waiting him here. Sister.—Address MRS. E. L. SELLERS, R. R. 36, 201 London Ave., Peoria, Ill.

"FIGHTING JACK BONHAM." Los Angeles, May, 1911, at Hotel Rockford. Played piano. Said to have been in Mexican revolution of 1910 and supposed to be there now. Supposed to be the Jack Bonham advertised for in another item in this column. If so, please write his mother. —Address MRS. JEAN BONHAM, care ADVENTURE.

EGYPTIAN SERVICE MEDAL. Found San Antonio, about August, 1913. Around edge of disc: "Private ———, Camel Corps, Egypt, R. S. G."—Address DONALD FRANCIS MCGREW, care ADVENTURE.

VAN WAGONER, known as Dutch.—Address L. T. 225.

BOE W. GILLESPIE, N. A. Blackham, E. H. Stout, Edw. Powers, and Max Davidman.—Address GUY E. NEFF, care ADVENTURE.

FRANK CRIEGER, C. J. CALHOUN. Please address A. S. HOFFMAN, care ADVENTURE.

JACK BONHAM. Born Hastings, Eng. Band of Royal Sussex 1900-6. To Sherbrooke, P. Q., Canada, March, 1906. Last heard from Aug., 1906, Sherbrooke. Natural musician. Word wanted by mother.—Address MRS. JEAN BONHAM, care ADVENTURE.

LEIGHTON EWELL, somewhere in Southwest.—Address brother, ERIC EWELL, Selma, Cal.

JOHN F. MADDOX, last seen in Mendocino Co., Calif., 1913.—Address R. L. HASTINGS, Box 726, Billings, Mont.

CHARLES FENTON, engineer. Last address was Toronto. Sought by niece, Alice Persse.—Address EDMUND S. CLOAK, 85 Willow Avenue, Moose Jaw, Sask., Canada.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

NUMBERS 56, 73, 76, W93, W107, W140, W150, W153, W183, W184, W189, C189, C198, C205, L. T. 207, W212, W215 please send us your present addresses. Letters forwarded to you at addresses given us don't reach you. —Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care ADVENTURE.

The following have been inquired for in "Lost Trails." They can get name of inquirer from this magazine:

A—E. BARDSLEY, John W. ("Red"); Blackham, N. A.; Bonavita, friends of Capt. Jack; Brooks, Al. H., rancher, Canada; Christensen, A. G., South America; Cockrill, Arthur R.; Cole, Egbert L.; Connelly, Jim, Co. I, 9th U. S. I.; Cory, Willis (Red, Kentuck, or Wins Golden), Philippines, Tex., Calif.; Crane, Roland Henry; Crawford, John and Lee; Culp, Simon P.; Cunningham, Patrick, Michael and James; Dalziel, James, bark *Socotra;* Davidman, Max; Davis, E. L.; Day, Stanley; Dean, George, whaling bark *Canton;* Deckard, Ed (Wessel); Denny Brothers; Duncan, George R.; Dwight, L. H., Hospital Corps, Philippines, 1900; Engesser, Conrad A.

F—L. FOY, George Havelock Willing; Francis, Henry, *Trenton,* Samoa; Gillespie, Boe W.; Gulliver, Iquique, '98; Haddock, John, Sr., of Dawson; Hamilton, Charles; Harson, Wm.; Haskinson, Gordon (English); Hellmann, H. H.; Hess, Erskine ("Erk"); Hiatt, Claud, brother of; Holbrook, Dis (civil engineer); Holden, Willis A.; Irvin, Howard, on *Maitai,* '11; Jasper, Key West, Mexico; Jay, Wilburn, Madero Foreign Legion; Jessup, Theodore V.; Knudsen, Fred, *Red Rock, Balmoral;* Landrum, J. W., Kentuckian; Lane, Martin, U. S. A., Klondike; Law, Gordon; Lee, John R.; Le Vonde, William; Lyons, William C.

M—O. MACDONALD, R.; MacDonald, John Ava; Mackie, Ed.; MacNeill, Jack V. ("Robbie"), artist; Martel, Dick, Hermosillo; McDaniels, Taylor, Hospital Corps, Philippines; McElvain, William; McGonigal, Ed., U. S. S. *Lancaster;* McKinzie, J. W., formerly U. S. N.; Megie, Benjamin F., South America or South Africa; Meissner, Pete, Grajervo; Mentusha, Big; Meyrick, Lieut. Archibald, Prince of Wales' Light Horse, Boer War; Moleres, Edward; Moriarty, John F., Madero Foreign Legion; Mentusha, Big; Miller, Frank; Morine, Capt C. D.; Morris, "Lee" or P. M.; Morris, Thomas George Dixon; Moulder, Joe; O'Meara, William, bark *Guiana,* '86; O'Neil, Captain Billy.

P—S. PARKER, CAPT. F. T.; Parker, Jess, cowpuncher; Pavilla, Jack, of "Jackly Wonders"; Powers, Edward; Raansvaal, Isaac, Co. I, 9th U. S. I.; Rae, Clarence, P. J. R.; Raeder, Edward J.; Ray, Paul; Richardson, Frank Eply; Robertson, Harry G., Customs, Manila; Rogers, Peter, of Manchester; Schaeffer, Charlie, Sonora; Scott, Fred, once Pennsylvania newspaperman; Sewell, "Dart"; Shannon, James; Shannon, William; Shepherd, Richard L., Vancouver and Toronto; Sherwood, F. A., Smith, F. E., *Olympia* at Manila; Smith, Oscar, Australian; Smith, William Chalmers, Mexico; Stearns, Herman; Stephenson, Robert Verne, Texan; Stewart, E. B.; Stout, E. H.; Sutherland, Charlie, once Bechuanaland Police; Sweidert, Dutchy" (phonetic spelling).

T—Z. TICE, WILLIAM G.; Travis, Joe; Van Leue, comrades of Capt. F. E.; Van Wagoner, "Dutch"; Wiley, Miles G.; Wilson, Charles Livingston; Willbern, Walter P.; Williams, Babe; Willis, A. Holden.

MISCELLANEOUS—Comrades in Co. E, 20th U. S. Infantry, Troop E, 7th U. S. Cavalry. Gibney, Jimmie; Gollrick, Charles, once U. S. N. H. C.; Brook, heirs of Glen; Tressider, Percy, comrades of; "Lintic" O'Sea, "El Rayo," comrades of; Nesbitt, Capt., V. C, and other comrades of M. M. Marsden; Hospital Corps, 23rd U. S. Infantry, 40th U. S. V. Old shipmates British bark *Lyderhorn.* Boer comrades of John Bussanich at Ladysmith and along Tugela. Also Murray, John; Morrows, Tom; McTigh, James; Ryan, Jack; Cooper, Dacombe, Sergt., once Troop B. M. M. P.; DuBois, Percy M., Plum, R. R.; Enscoe, Joe; Carruthers, Chas.; Selig, Lester! Hogan, Thos. L.; Osbourne, Andy, once of *Evening Star.* Any one 4th Texas Vol. Infantry in Spanish War. O'Connor, A. S.; Ross, Bob; Van Damme, Jimmie; Kufeke Hans; Griffiths, Jack; Harries, Julian; Gardiner, Jack; all once E and C Troops, B. S. A. P.

MANUSCRIPTS sent us by the following are being held by us, having been returned to us as unclaimed at the addresses furnished:

W. Lynch, Trenton, N. J.; W. Mack, Pacheca, Mexico; Henry W. Edwards, New York; W. G. Gormley, Ontario, Canada; George Stillions, Chicago, Ill.; Francis Manston, Chicago, Cal.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

IN THE nature of things "Lost Trails" will go on growing. Not all the lost will be found. Some undoubtedly are dead, often leaving no trace (cases where one of our identification-cards might have cleared the mystery). Some are far from the haunts of men. Some may be unwilling to reply.

"Lost Trails" has succeeded where detective-agencies, newspapers and all other kinds of inquiries have failed. But "Lost Trails" can not find some of them, and their names appear month after month unanswered to.

We are limited in the space at our disposal, but so long as there is even a forlorn hope of finding one of the lost ones we mean to stick to his trail. So we are adopting the following plan:

Every item will be published three times, then taken out. But in the *January* and *July* numbers of each year we will publish the names of *all* who have been inquired for and remain unfound. These two issues, January and July, will come to be watched for and examined with particular care by those who wander the earth and may be able to send news of the missing—a kind of friendly clearing-house and search-agency that reaches where nothing else can reach.

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The Trail Ahead

The June ADVENTURE was better than any preceding number, July at least as good as June, and August better than either of them. We believe this ourselves and we think that you will agree with us when you've read all three. We set out to make ADVENTURE twice as good in 1914 as it had been before, but you, not we, are to be the judges. All we can say is that we're quite contented to put into your hands the case as it will be represented by the twelve numbers of this year.

Take an advance look at the August number. It will reach you July 3d. More good reading-matter in it than in two full-sized books. We'll match it against any other fiction magazine on the stands.

DICK ANTHONY OF ARRAN — The First of a Splendid Series of Stories by *Talbot Mundy*

All Talbot Mundy's stories are good stories, as you know. But when he casts all other work aside and lays himself out to do the very best that's in him you're going to get something that is big and strong enough all by itself to carry a whole issue of any magazine. If you have a drop of real blood in you, *Dick Anthony of Arran* will win your heart. And adventures? Wait till you read that first story—"The Sword of Iskander!" I'll not tell you any more about it. Except that each story is complete in itself and the series one that will make *Dick Anthony of Arran* famous.

ARSÈNE LUPIN—AND THE TIGER'S TEETH — By *Maurice Leblanc*

There have been four preëminently great detectives in fiction—*Lecoq*, *Dupin*, *Sherlock Holmes*, and *Arsène Lupin*. The first two are of the past. *Arsène Lupin* is the most recent. Not a detective? Wait and see. Through both stage and type he has become famous on both sides of the Atlantic and in many languages. He has passed through many wonderful adventures. And now he comes to us with the biggest and most thrilling adventure of all. The story—in four parts—begins in the August number and it will guarantee you all the tense excitement you can ask for. The strongest detective story of the year.

THE WRONG TWIST — *A Come-On Charley Story*

You meet *Come-On Charley* in this issue. Without any further word from me you will be wanting to hear his next adventure—his first experience in a big city. And he and *Percival Teeters* certainly have one! This series of stories about *Come-On Charley*—each entirely complete in itself—is going to make its mark, and a big one at that.

BUG COLE AND THE TRIPLE SQUEEZE

Is such a thing possible in baseball as a triple squeeze? At first glance you will probably say no. But W. B. Hanna, for years the baseball editor of the New York *Sun* and one of the best students of the game in America, has worked this point out very carefully. It is a fiction story with a good swing to it, but in it Mr. Hanna demonstrates that the triple squeeze, under the right conditions, is possible. See whether he doesn't prove his point.

THE ULTIMATE INHERITORS — A Complete Novelette

This story belongs to a class ADVENTURE generally passes by. We couldn't pass by this one. It's the kind of story that keeps your muscles strung taut while you read it. Laid in the Southwest. Strong men face to face with a peril terrible enough to make the strongest blanch. Berg Bellair has given us a tale we'll not soon forget.

MISS DEMONSTRATOR

In "How It Ended," the third tale about our friend *Miss Dem*, we get an adventure among the folk of the stage that ranges all the way from a knife-stab to *Miss Dem's* own amusing little jests with life.

THE PROBATIONER — By *Carrington Boykin*

The life of a fireman is, of course, crammed with adventure. This is one of the best fireman stories we ever read.

HE FOUND THE GARDEN OF EDEN

This is a humorous tale about that prince of liars, *Ted Gillet*, by S. B. H. Hurst. Read it and have a chuckle.

THE LAUGHING CAVALIER — By *Baroness Orczy*

The end and climax of this adventure story about a dashing soldier of fortune, the original of Frans Hals' painting and an ancestor of the *Scarlet Pimpernel*.

AND OTHERS

The above is not the full list of stories in the August number, though it's enough and good enough for any one magazine. Others, not yet fully determined upon, will be added. They will be just that much velvet.

A. S. H.

Watch for the August Adventure

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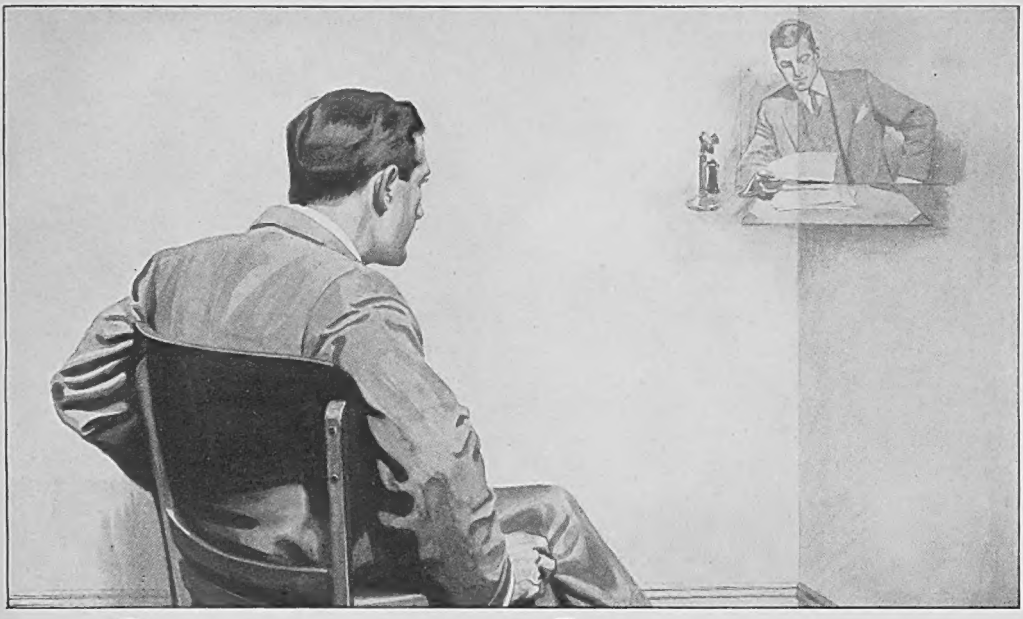

Go over in the corner

and have a good half hour's talk with yourself

Where will you be next year? You have your mind set on a better job, haven't you? You want to earn more money, don't you? You feel that you ought to make more of yourself and that NOW is the time to start. Right so far, isn't it?

Well, what are you going to do about it? Just "wishing" won't get you anywhere. Do you know enough? Have you had the **training** that the bigger job requires? Be honest with yourself. Look the situation squarely in the face. Your whole future depends upon the way you answer those questions now.

If you are willing to admit that the job you want requires a big man, a well-informed man, a **well-trained** man, why not let the International Correspondence Schools qualify you for the job?

Every month 400 men of all ages and occupations report advancement in position and salary wholly due to I. C. S. training.

These men stopped "wishing" and **acted.** They marked the coupon.

Mark the Coupon

No matter how little you earn and regardless of your present situation or previous lack of opportunity, the I. C. S. can **help you. Mark the coupon to-day.**

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Box 884, SCRANTON, PA.
Explain, without further obligation on my part, how I can qualify for the position before which I mark **X**

Salesmanship	Civil Service
Electrical Engineer	Railway Mail Clerk
Elec. Lighting Supt.	Bookkeeping
Electric Car Running	Stenography & Typewriting
Electric Wireman	Window Trimming
Telephone Expert	Show Card Writing
Architect	Lettering & Sign Painting
Building Contractor	Advertising
Architectural Draftsman	Commercial Illustrating
Structural Engineer	Industrial Designing
Concrete Construction	Commercial Law
Mechan. Engineer	Automobile Running
Mechanical Draftsman	Teacher
Refrigeration Engineer	English Branches
Civil Engineer	Good English for Every One
Surveyor	Agriculture
Mine Superintendent	Poultry Farming
Metal Mining	Plumbing & Steam Fitting
Locomotive Fireman & Eng.	Sheet Metal Worker
Stationary Engineer	Navigation Spanish
Textile Manufacturing	Languages French
Gas Engines	Chemist German

Name_____

Present Occupation _____

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HERE'S the opportunity of a lifetime if you're a golfer. Read what the world's greatest professional has to say about American golf and golfers. Some of his criticisms may astonish you, but his advice will surely bring hope to many a forlorn soul struggling with the "dimpled pill." And who *do* you think is the greatest player in America, according to Vardon? We'll bet our best putter you'll get a surprise.

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Everybody's Magazine

for JUNE

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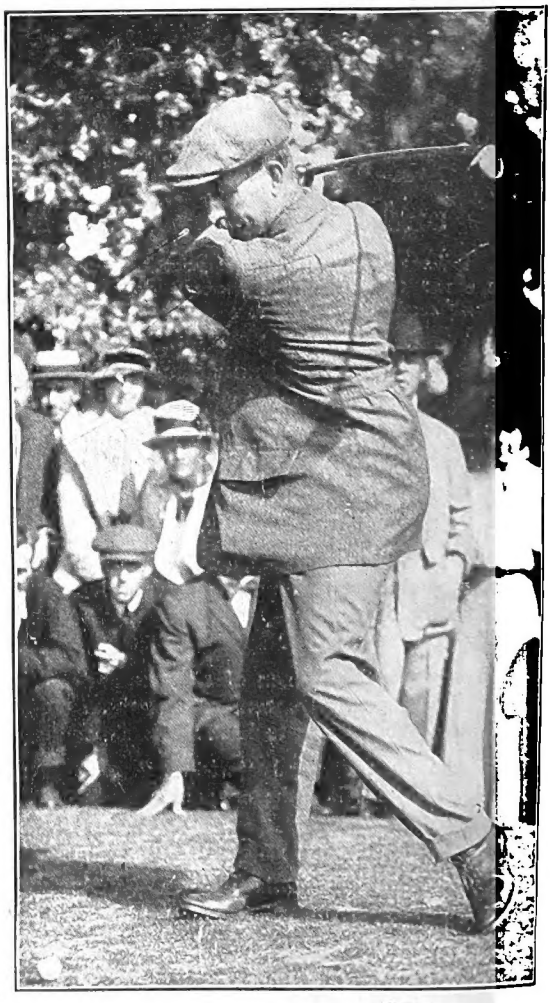

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